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THOMAS  
DE QUINCEY



THOMAS  
DE QUINCEY

*A BIOGRAPHY*

*BY*  
HORACE AINSWORTH EATON

*LONDON*  
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*To*

E. L. E.

R. B. W.      H. C. W.

S. L. E.      J. A. E.

R. E. E.      F. A. E.

E. R. B.      R. C. B.

E. B. E.



## PREFACE

DE QUINCEY himself has told us much of his childhood, of his school days, of his struggles with opium, his victories and defeats. Letters in certain periods enable us to follow his movements almost from day to day. Memoirs of others give fairly complete pictures of some of his later years. But in between are gaps of irrecoverable blankness. In spite of care and research, continuity of narrative becomes impossible. In another way, also, the evidence obtainable is uneven. De Quincey's autobiographical papers show glimpses of his mind and of his inner experiences. An occasional letter reveals the man for a moment. But most of his correspondence deals merely with outward things, articles in preparation, debts, facts often inessential.

Much of the matter which I have gathered together is still in MS. or only partly printed — the letters, for instance, to the Wordsworth family from 1803–1812; the letters to Wordsworth in connexion with *The Westmorland Gazette*; scores of letters to the house of Blackwood during the long association of De Quincey with *Maga*; many others scattered through the years; records of court, all too frequent; reports of conversation. Furthermore, much matter, even though in print, has been concealed in volumes so obscure as to be almost unattainable.

I have endeavoured, as far as it has been humanly possible, to be exhaustive in my research. Yet there must be occasional letters in private hands or others likely to turn up from time to time in the autograph market after this volume is in print, to disconcert me. I believe, however, that there is no considerable collection extant to which I have not had access.

The aim of the present volume is to present a life of Thomas De Quincey with all the facts set down as far as known. I have not introduced letters for their own sake merely because De Quincey wrote them, hard as it has been to exclude some of the more delightful. I have given only those which are especially informative of fact or mood. I have tried to let De Quincey tell his own story as far as pos-



sible. I have not undertaken to elaborate at length upon his mind and art, a topic which deserves a separate volume. Nor have I written at length critical estimates of his work and literary position. Not at length, I say; for I have interspersed short critical passages where they seemed necessary and yet with the endeavour not to interrupt the narrative too seriously.

Naturally enough, the main outlines of De Quincey's life are well known. I must make liberal use of his confessions and other familiar material. Thus there are long stretches in the following pages which are inevitably 'old stuff.' Yet careful testing by external evidence has often given fresh assurance or offered not uninteresting correction. An occasional new letter has thrown light or confirmation; and long periods have been filled in which have previously been vague. I have no startlingly new thesis to propose as to his mind or character. I can rely only upon inference from external fact. I hope, however, that the portrait takes on new life so that De Quincey emerges as an understandable human being.

In the seventy-five years which have elapsed since the death of De Quincey in 1859, there has been but one biography of importance, that of Dr. Alexander H. Japp, which under the pseudonym H. A. Page appeared in 1877 — *Thomas De Quincey: his Life and Writings*; and which with revision was republished under Dr. Japp's own name in 1890. This was written with the co-operation of De Quincey's daughters and was in full measure an official biography. It was based upon the family collection of letters and other papers and contained rich store of them. Letters, etc. which Japp did not print in the *Life* he later edited in the *Thomas De Quincey Memorials* (1891). But Dr. Japp's *Life* has its shortcomings. He failed to take full advantage of the material which he had actually in his hands, as examination of most of the manuscripts he used frequently reveals. This failure was partly due to the fact that he was painting a Victorian portrait with all the warts omitted; but partly to somewhat careless workmanship and, too often, to his overlooking the significance of some of his documents. Yet in spite of these faults, Japp's volumes on De Quincey are still precious; and upon them, from his days

to ours, the lives and studies of the Opium Eater have been based. Of these, the best known are that of Professor David Masson in the English Men of Letters series, and that of Sir Leslie Stephen in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. There have been other studies of De Quincey's mind and art, most notable, perhaps, being that of Henry S. Salt, Esq.; but of straight biography, no more.

As Mrs. Bairdsmith and Miss Emily De Quincey, De Quincey's daughters, co-operated with Dr. Japp to make the first biography of their father valuable, so, happily for me, have my very dear friends, the Misses Bairdsmith, De Quincey's grand-daughters, done everything in their power to assist me in the preparation of the present Life. To them any thanks I can express fall short of what I feel. But their generosity in permitting me to make full use of their treasures has been equalled by others. No one whom I have approached in my long research for permission to examine and use manuscript letters has refused me. Notable among my benefactors are the late Gordon Wordsworth, Esq., the grandson of the Poet, and Messrs. William Blackwood and Sons. To them I beg to express my special gratitude. But to many more, even though they had less abundance to share, I give my sincere thanks. To do so more effectively, I list the names of all:

The Misses Bairdsmith; Messrs. William Blackwood and Sons; Lawrence Clay, Esq.; the late Colonel J. F. Craig, C. M. G.; the late Sir John R. Findlay; Lieutenant Colonel John MacRae Gilstrap, Deputy Hereditary Keeper of Holyrood who permitted me to examine the records of Holyrood; and Bailie Cunningham who assisted me in my search; Stanley H. le Fleming, Esq.; the Misses Masson; Colonel Maxwell Scott who permitted me to examine letters at Abbotsford; and James Curle, Esq., who assisted me there; Elkin Mathews, Ltd.; Captain F. L. Pleadwell, U. S. N.; the late Josiah P. Quincy; Mrs. H. D. Rawnsley; Henry S. Salt, Esq.; Professor Anderson Scott; Miss Scott-Moncrieff; James Sinton, Esq.; Dr. J. Morris Slemons; the Reverend C. H. Steel; Miss Wilson; and Gordon Wordsworth, Esq.

My thanks are also extended to the Managers of the

following public institutions: The British Museum, The Buffalo Public Library, The Manchester (England) Public Libraries, Register House (Edinburgh), Sheriff's Office (Edinburgh), Somerset House (London), Widener Library (Harvard University), and Worcester College Library (Oxford).

In listing the sources of original material, I should perhaps mention that I have in my own possession a number of letters of De Quincey; a large collection of notes from De Quincey to the Hoggs from 1850 to 1859; and a considerable correspondence of Dr. Japp and De Quincey's daughters in relation to Japp's *Life*, a collection bought at Sotheby's in 1926.

I wish to give my thanks also to the following firms for their kind permission to quote from their publications: Messrs. A. & C. Black, Ltd.; Messrs. William Blackwood & Sons; Messrs. Ginn & Company; Messrs. William Heineman, Ltd.; John Hogg, Esq.; Messrs. Houghton Mifflin Company; Messrs. Macmillan Company; The Oxford University Press; Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons; Titus Wilson, Esq., and the Armitr Trustees; *The* (London) *Times*; *The Westmorland Gazette*.

I am also grateful to Messrs. Maggs Bros., Ltd., and Messrs. Elkin Mathews, Ltd. for their generous permission to quote from certain autograph letters of De Quincey which they have had for sale.

HORACE AINSWORTH EATON

*Syracuse University*  
20 December 1935

*Note.* Miss Florence Mae Bairdsmith died suddenly on 27 December 1935. At the time of her death she was the elder of the two surviving grand-daughters of Thomas De Quincey, the daughters of Florence De Quincey (Mrs. Richard Bairdsmith). I wish to record my deep personal sorrow.

H. A. E.

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THOMAS  
DE QUINCEY





CHAPTER I  
GREENHAY

1785-1796 ✓

I

THE ancestry of Thomas De Quincey is lost in obscurity. All we know of it is that his father was a merchant in Manchester and that *he* bore the name of Quincey, without the prefix. Yet De Quincey himself was convinced, apparently without any research and from what was, doubtless, family tradition, that he was descended from that noble line which ages before had swooped down from the northland upon the coast of France, had settled in Normandy and taken the name of the old town of Quincy for its own; had crossed into England with William the Conqueror; had produced the earls of Winchester and had spread magnificently into Scotland. And it was, as he thought, from the same stock that the American family of Quincy had stemmed. All this was an easy and possible assumption which had a certain romantic charm; and Thomas has recorded this noble descent with obvious pride.<sup>1</sup> Once as a boy he had an interview with King George III and the King suggested that perhaps the De Quinceys were of Huguenot extraction; but Thomas assured His Majesty that his family was of far more ancient origin.<sup>2</sup> Recent investigation, however, has been unable to trace these grand connexions and has cast somewhat more than doubt upon the antiquity and nobility of the family.<sup>3</sup> One can only say that Thomas De Quincey was content to accept on faith a noble ancestry, especially in his younger manhood. But it was all a harmless hypothesis and plays but little part in the sad life he was to lead, except as it caused him to cling to the aristocratic prefix to his name.

Thomas De Quincey tells us that his father dropped the prefix *de* upon entering trade; but there is no evidence that

<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. Masson (1897), III, 457 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, I, 167.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bain, F. S. A. (Scot.), *The Genealogist*, N. S. VII (1891), 17-21.

he ever used it. So far as we know he was always known as plain Thomas Quincey; <sup>4</sup> he so published himself in his business and so signed his name to his will. But after his death his widow and family adopted the particle.<sup>5</sup> One would like to know what induced the family to make the change. Since Thomas was less than fourteen in February 1799, when the new form first appeared in a letter, the adoption must be reasonably laid to Mrs. Quincey herself. But whatever are the facts, by 1802 she had reverted to the simpler form, moved, no doubt, by her growing evangelicalism which caused her to look upon the aristocratic *de* as worldly vanity. Henceforth she was always to be Elizabeth Penson Quincey, and apparently persistent in trying to induce her children to follow her lead, if letters constantly addressed to them without the prefix can be so interpreted. But all her sons stuck to De Quincey; and her daughters, at least for a time, used now one form and then another.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dr. A. H. Japp reports a tradition, which I have been unable to trace, that Thomas De Quincey's grandfather owned considerable land near Ashby-de-la-Zouche and that he was the father by more than one marriage of some twenty-two children. He was driven to sell his property in order to settle his sons in life. (*Thomas De Quincey: His Life and Writings*, p. 2.)

<sup>5</sup> The first known document after the death of Thomas Quincey containing the form "De Quincey" is a letter of 9 April 1799, signed R. De Quincey, our author's younger brother (*De Quincey Memorials*, ed. Japp, I, 18); and this is followed on 14 February 1800 by a letter signed E. De Quincey, our author's mother (*Memls.*, I, 19). The earliest letter signed by Thomas De Quincey with this form is that of 22 July 1800 (*Thomas De Quincey: His Life and Writings*, by H. A. Page, I, 48). He clung to the prefix throughout the rest of his life, with the single exception of a series of letters between the years 1828 and 1832 in regard to a mortgage on "The Nab" in Westmorland — a series in which, apparently for business reasons, he felt it wiser to have his own name correspond with that of his mother who had long since reverted to her late husband's habit of using the simple Quincey and who was standing sponsor for him in the transaction. (*Rydal*, by the late Miss Armitt; ed. W. F. Rawnslay, pp. 692 ff.)

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller discussion of the matter, see *Diary of Thomas De Quincey for 1803*, ed. H. A. Eaton, p. 242.

It is not easy to fix the correct method of writing the prefix, whether with a small *d* or a capital *D*. The evidence is conflicting. De Quincey both in pronouncement and in practice contradicted himself. In at least one place he declared unmistakably for *de*; Professor Masson, a very high authority, reiterates that the Opium Eater always wrote his name with a small *d*. But I have seen many letters — I possess some myself — in which the *D* is certainly a capital. De Quincey was inconsistent in various periods of his life. But in his later years he did prefer *de Quincey*; and his family, children and grandchildren alike, have cherished that form. Custom has, however, decreed that Thomas De Quincey shall be known with the capital *D*; and I have, therefore, reluctantly bent to custom in the present book.



**PLATE II. ELIZABETH PENSON QUINCEY**  
*From a miniature in the possession of Miss Bairdsmith*



## II

THOMAS QUINCEY, the father of Thomas De Quincey, was born, apparently, in 1752 or 1753. Of his early history we know nothing. The first notice of him, so far as I can find, shows that he was one of the jurors of the Court Leet in Manchester in 1778.<sup>7</sup> In November 1780, 'was married at St. George's, Queen Square, Mr. Thomas Quincey, linen merchant in this town [Manchester] to Miss Penson of North Street, London.'<sup>8</sup> By this time he was evidently a flourishing business man. To be sure, he was more than that; for if, as is generally admitted and his son unquestioningly believed, he was the author of a book of English travels, he had claim to be in a small way a man of letters, also.<sup>9</sup>

Yet he made no claim to being other than a British merchant. 'My father,' writes his son, 'was a plain and unpretending man, who began life with what is considered in England (or was considered) a small fortune, viz. six thousand pounds.' Some time before 1780 the firm of J. and T. Quincey was doing business in Market Street Lane, Manchester; but the partnership was, for some unknown cause, dissolved on 6 December 1780, as we learn from a notice in *The London Gazette*. All that is known of John is that he outlived his brother and received a mourning ring in his will. Thomas continued the business; as a published notice said, 'all debts of said partnership to be paid by Thomas Quincey, who carries on.'<sup>10</sup> Evidently he 'carried on' successfully, for three

<sup>7</sup> Fred Leary, Letter to *The Manchester City News*, 25 April 1896. The name of T. Quincey was not in the Manchester directory of 1772-3, evidence that he had not at that date settled there. (Espinasse, *Lancashire Worthies*, II, 382. See also, *Notes and Queries*, 20 November 1875.)

<sup>8</sup> Espinasse, II, 379.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Gentleman's Magazine* (not the *Quarterly Review* as De Quincey writes) of 1774 (XLIV), and continuing through five numbers, appeared a series of papers which were reprinted with some additions under the title *A Short Tour in the Midland Counties of England Performed in the summer of 1772, together with an Account of a Similar Excursion Undertaken September, 1774*. The book was published anonymously in London in 1795; but the articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine* had been signed 'By T-Q-'; and described by the editor as 'the first production of the writer's pen.'

These articles were first identified by James Crossly in *Notes & Queries*, 5th Ser. IV, 407 (20 November 1875); the notice is reprinted in Page, II, 340. De Quincey comments upon the volume of his father in an autobiographical sketch, *Works*, I, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Fred Leary, *Manch. City News*, 25 April 1896.

years later, on 2 December 1783, *The Manchester Mercury* printed this announcement: — 'Thomas Quincey, intending very shortly to decline all retail trade, is now selling off *on low Terms* his Prints, Muslins, Table Linens, Gauzes, Lutes, etc., of all sorts, with *all his cut* Goods of whatever kind and Haberdashery Articles in general. N. B. — The Irish-Linen Scotch, etc. Trades in the *Wholesale Line*, he will continue as usual.' <sup>11</sup> These facts, in themselves of little importance, serve none the less as a correction to De Quincey's claim that his father was 'a merchant in the English sense, a sense rigorously exclusive; that is, he was a man engaged in *foreign* commerce, and no other; and therefore, in *wholesale* commerce, and no other.' <sup>12</sup> No doubt this was true from 1780 until his death; and it may well be that his son was actually ignorant that his father had ever been in the retail trade; for Thomas was not born until 1785 and presumably Mrs. Quincey rarely referred to humbler days. But Thomas Quincey was certainly in retail trade when he married Miss Penson of London, whose pretensions were 'in some respects more elevated than his own.'

## III

ALL our knowledge of Elizabeth Penson's parents comes from De Quincey himself. 'My grandfather at one time held an office under the king; how named, I once heard, but have forgotten; only this I remember, that it was an office which conferred the title of *Esquire*.' He 'was doubly distinguished: first by his iron constitution and impregnable health' — although he died at the comparatively early age of sixty and before De Quincey was born; and secondly, by 'the magical versatility of his talents, and his power of self-accommodation to all humours, tempers, and ages.'

"Omnis Aristippum decuit color, et status, et res."

And in allusion to this line from Horace it was, that amongst his literary friends he was known familiarly by the name of Aristippus.' <sup>13</sup> He was energetic and he had influence of a sort; so that when his two sons, Edward and Thomas, who resembled him not at all 'physically nor in moral versatility,'

<sup>11</sup> *Espinasse*, II, 380.

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, I, 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Works*, I, 402 f.

had grown old enough to wish to enter the army, Samuel Penson gained for them both in one day lieutenancies in the East India Company's service. Together, when they were sixteen and seventeen, in 1780 or 1781, they sailed for Bengal. Edward soon died of sunstroke; Thomas lived to play an important role in the drama of his nephew's life.

As for Mrs. Penson, the mother of the two boys and Elizabeth, we know only that her name was Sarah and that she spent her last days in her daughter's household, where she was dimly remembered by her grandson as 'gentle,' with obvious vagueness of recollection. But since her epitaph in St. Anne's churchyard, Manchester, records that she died on 16 January 1790, aged sixty-nine years, and thus in De Quincey's fifth year, this fact is hardly surprising.

It would be natural to suppose that Thomas Quincey first met Elizabeth Penson in London; but the wedding was in Manchester. Presumably the young couple set up house-keeping in the house in Market Street which Thomas Quincey owned, perhaps in connexion with the shop; or perhaps they began life together over the shop, as was common in those days.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV

BUT to return to Thomas Quincey. 'My father,' writes his son, 'had no brilliant qualities: but the moral integrity which I have attributed to his class was so peculiarly expressed in *him*, that in my early life, and for many years after his death, I occasionally met strangers who would say to me, almost in the same form of words, (so essential was their harmony as to the thing) — "Sir, I knew your father: he was the most upright man I ever met with in my life." Nobody that I remember, praised him under the notion of a clever man, or a man of talent. Yet that he was so in some subordinate sense is probable, both from his success as a man of business, and more unequivocally in other ways.'<sup>15</sup>

In 1788 Thomas Quincey took a new partner into the firm,

<sup>14</sup> Mr. Quincey also owned a house in Fountain Street. (W. E. A. Axon, in *Bookman*, 7 February 1907.) In 1788, Thomas Quincey advertised for a lost dog, 'Tyger,' to be returned to him at Moss Side (Leary, *Manch. City News*, 25 April 1896).

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, I, 21.



and the firm name became 'Quincey and Duck.'<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Mr. Quincey needed help in handling a growing business or, more likely, he needed a responsible person to leave in the office while he travelled abroad in the way of trade or to seek relief in warmer climes from the consumption which was threatening. At least, it was mostly after this date, 1788, that Thomas Quincey made long sojourns in foreign lands in vain search for health. So much was he absent, indeed, that even when Thomas was eight years old—as we learn from later reminiscence—his father would not have been able to challenge him as a relative. 'Nor,' De Quincey adds with obvious exaggeration, 'I *him*, had we happened to meet on the public roads. . . .

'This arose from the accident of his having lived abroad for a space that, measured against *my* life, was a very long one. First, he lived for months in Portugal, at Lisbon, and at Cintra; next in Madeira; then in the West Indies; sometimes in Jamaica, sometimes in St. Kitt's. . . He had, indeed, repeatedly returned to England, and met my mother at watering-places on the south coast of Devonshire, etc. But I, as a younger child, had not been selected for such excursions from home.'<sup>17</sup>

When in 1793 the game was up, and Thomas Quincey was returning home to die, he came from the West Indies. Evidently while he was seeking to re-establish his health, he was able to buy and sell for Quincey and Duck; yet, at best, those latter years must have been disheartening. He long kept up the fight, however, and planned for a prosperous future; for in 1791 he built, or finished building, with the expectation of growing wealth the substantial house of Greenhay, a house too expensive for his widow to maintain on the income from his estate.

Throughout his relatively short life, he was indulging his cultivated tastes and laying in various ways the foundation for the position he coveted, namely, that of a solid English merchant, or, perhaps, of an English country gentleman. To this end he spent some pains and money in gathering a library. De Quincey says, 'It was very extensive; comprehending the

<sup>16</sup> Leary, *Manch. City News*, 25 April 1896.

<sup>17</sup> *Works*, I, 56.



**PLATE III. THOMAS QUINCEY**  
From a miniature in the possession of Miss Bairdsmith



whole general literature both of England and Scotland for the preceding generation. It was impossible to name a book in the classes of history, biography, voyages and travels, belles lettres, or popular divinity, which was wanting. And to these were added a pretty complete body of local tours (such as Pennant's) and topography; many of which last, being illustrated extensively with plates, were fixed for ever in the recollections of children. But one thing was noticeable, — all the books were English.' <sup>18</sup> Curiously enough a catalogue of this collection is preserved in the note-book in which De Quincey wrote his *Diary* of 1803; and if it is complete, as it may not be, one must eliminate from the description just quoted a good many of the adjectives. According to the inventory, the library contained only about 450 volumes; but it included all sorts of literature of the eighteenth century in English; it was especially strong in travels and voyages, perhaps stirring the young Thomas's taste for that kind of literature. There was but one book in a foreign tongue, the New Testament in French. The library was not sold, apparently, after Thomas Quincey's death, but moved with the widow in her various changes of residence. <sup>19</sup>

The elder Quincey was also interested in pictures. In his recorded tour he had visited all the private galleries within his range; and his son wrote, 'Partly, perhaps, it might be a cause, and partly an effect, of this attention paid by my father to the galleries of art in the aristocratic mansions that throughout the principal rooms of his own house there were scattered a small collection of paintings of the old Italian masters . . . a circumstance of exclusive elegance . . . belonging very generally to my father's class.' <sup>20</sup> It was surely a collection rather in line with what was expected of a prosperous merchant than a sign of special taste; and yet aesthetic feeling descended to his children: William had considerable talent for drawing; and if Thomas had little love of painting, he was gifted with love for poetry and music. .

If such were the elegancies of the family of Thomas Quin-

<sup>18</sup> *Works*, I, 24.

<sup>19</sup> This note-book with the catalogue and *Diary* are in the possession of the Rev. C. H. Steel.

<sup>20</sup> *Works*, I, 22.

cey, they were also those of well-to-do English merchants of the last half of the eighteenth century. Their households were simple in the midst of wealth and comfort. If there were many servants, they were not for show and were rarely in livery; even carriages were by no means general in families which spent as much as two thousand pounds a year. Mrs. Quincey had no carriage until after her husband's death.<sup>21</sup> As for society, Manchester was like the rest of provincial England, with here and there an intellectual group, keeping in touch with *savants* at home and abroad by correspondence, and by study and discussion assimilating the latest ideas in published books. The Reverend Samuel Hall, who will reappear frequently in the narrative, was active in the Manchester circle and was one of the founders of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in 1781;<sup>22</sup> and since Mr. Hall and Mr. Quincey were intimate, it is safe to assume that the linen-draper was at least upon the fringes of the intellectual coterie. We also know that the Quinceys had frequent visitors at Greenhay of higher social pretensions than the *litterati* of Manchester; as, for example, Mrs. Schreiber and her wards, Miss Smith and Miss Watson, later Lady Carbery. Certain it is that Mrs. Quincey wherever she lived, whether in Bath, or Chester, or Wrington, always found herself entirely at home in a social rank above that of the widow of an ordinary merchant.

## v

INTO this family and environment, Thomas Quincey, known to the world as Thomas De Quincey, was born on 15 August 1785, the second son, but the fifth child of his parents. The first son and first child was William. He was followed by three daughters, Elizabeth, Jane, and Mary, the first two of whom died in childhood — Jane in 1786, and Elizabeth on 12 June 1792. After Thomas, came Richard, known in the family as 'Pink'; a second Jane, and, finally, a posthumous son, Henry. The eight children were born during a period

<sup>21</sup> 'My father's death made little or no change in the household economy, except that my mother ever afterwards kept a carriage; which my father, in effect, exacted upon his death-bed.' (De Quincey, *Life and Manners*, Boston, 1851, p. 26.)

<sup>22</sup> Bardsley, *Memorials of St. Anne's Church*, 1877.

of less than thirteen years, so that the house must have been full of childish activities; and the boyhood of Thomas was spent, not in solitude, but in a group of exceedingly lively contemporaries. His later eccentricities cannot be laid to excessive retirement or unusual opportunities for lonely introspection in early childhood.<sup>23</sup>

Thomas was certainly born in Manchester; but there has been considerable controversy as to the exact location.<sup>24</sup> He was baptized at St. Anne's church on 23 September 1785; and his name was given to him in honour of his maternal uncle, Thomas Penson.

But Thomas's childhood was not spent in Manchester itself; for from the directory of 1788 one learns that Mr. Quincey was resident at Moss Side, presumably 'The Farm,' just outside the city limits;<sup>25</sup> and De Quincey himself puts the removal of the family to 'The Farm' very soon after his baptism.<sup>26</sup> Of this residence we hear little, naturally enough, since the family moved into the new and more imposing house of Greenhay in 1791, when the boy was only six. We know only that a greenhouse formed a principal room in the country house with the modest name of The Farm — a house which was, presumably, not so modest as its name might seem to indicate, when one considers the prosperity and the ambition of the owner.

It is with the new house of Greenhay not far from The Farm, but a clear mile from the outskirts of Manchester, that we associate De Quincey in his childhood; and it is this house with its small domain that is the setting for some of his most delightful autobiographical papers.<sup>27</sup> The mansion in the

<sup>23</sup> *Works*, I, 29n; also the epitaphs in St. Anne's churchyard, Manchester.

<sup>24</sup> So far as one can judge from much discussion in local papers, etc. the consensus of opinion of Manchester antiquaries favours the claim that he was born in the building later known as The Prince's Tavern, a house standing through the next century at the corner of Cross and John Dalton Streets. This, at least, was the opinion of Mr. W. E. A. Axon, a distinguished authority upon Manchester matters; and of Mr. J. A. Green, the careful bibliographer of De Quincey. At the time of Thomas's birth the house was inhabited by a Mr. Dinwiddie, an intimate friend of Mr. Quincey; and it was during a visit of Mrs. Quincey to the Dinwiddies that her son was born. (John Evans, *Manchester Guardian*, 9 March 1882.)

<sup>25</sup> Fred Leary, MS. paper in the Manchester Public Library.

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, I, 26.

<sup>27</sup> It was situated in Moss Side at the time; and in Laurent's Map of Man-

oil painting of Carse was substantial and unpretentious; of brick, square and dignified, with suggestions of wings in the rear, planned clearly to correspond to the needs of an already large family and to the importance of a man of increasing wealth; 'elegant but plain,' is De Quincey's description, 'having nothing remarkable about it but the doors and windows of the superior rooms, which were made of mahogany, sent as a present from a foreign correspondent.' <sup>28</sup> Like The Farm, it possessed, a greenhouse, 'the principal room as to dimensions in a spacious house'; it was large enough to have two staircases; and the rooms opened upon a hall which ascended through all the storeys. In situation it was solitary, forming a *terminus ad quem*, beyond which was nothing but a cluster of cottages composing the little hamlet of Greenhill; it was approached by a shady lane from Oxford Road. 'There were two lawns in the shrubbery that invested three sides of the house: . . . Along the margin of this side-lawn ran a little brook, (the Corn Brook) which had been raised to a uniform level, and kept up by means of a weir at the point where it quitted the premises; after which it resumed its natural character of wildness as it trotted on to the little hamlet of Greenhill.' It was a 'modest estate and mansion, which (including hot walls, offices, and gardener's house) had cost only six thousand pounds;' but by some freak of chance it has apparently given its name devised by Mrs. Quincey to a section of Manchester in the form of 'Greenheys.' <sup>29</sup>

## VI

HERE at The Farm and at Greenhay, we hear of Thomas from the very first as a sickly child. Up to the completion of his sixth year, he was a privileged pet; an advantage which he owed to a long illness, an ague, stretching over two entire

chester for 1793, the 'late Mr. Quincey's house' is marked on the bank of the Corn Brook (better known as the Black Brook). On the present map of Manchester, the estate ran from the beginning of Greenheys Lane and from the opposite end of Coupland Street to a little beyond the end of Burlington Street. (Leary, MS. paper in the Manchester Public Library.)

<sup>28</sup> *Life and Manners*, p. 24. I know the painting only through reproductions. I have been unable to locate the original.

<sup>29</sup> See *Autobiography*, 'Parentage and Paternal Home'; and 'Introduction to the World of Strife,' *Works*, vol. I.

years of his infancy, from his second to his fourth year. The result of his illness was, as he implied, that he was gentle as well as diminutive, fond rather of the society of girls and women than of boys, and only too glad to be caressed and played with by girls older than himself. Thus he remembered with pleasure the occasions when Miss Smith and Miss Watson, ten years older than he, carried him about 'like a doll from his second to his ninth year.' With his one older brother away at school, the atmosphere of the nursery was predominantly feminine, as we can vividly see in the little sketch he draws: — 'And in long dark evenings, my three sisters with myself sat by the firelight round the *guard* of our nursery,' reading or looking at pictures in Bewick's *Birds* or the great illustrated Bible; the children, as he adds, all constitutionally touched with pensiveness.<sup>80</sup>

The pensiveness of early childhood might almost be taken for granted in the light of later characteristics; but the recorded memories of those days fit in with the preconception.

'The earliest incidents in my life which left stings in my memory so as to be remembered at this day [1845] were two, and both before I could have completed my second year; namely, first, a remarkable dream of terrific grandeur about a favourite nurse, which is interesting to myself for this reason — that it demonstrates my dreaming tendencies to have been constitutional, and not dependent upon laudanum; and, secondly, the fact of having connected a profound sense of pathos with the reappearance, very early in the spring, of some crocuses. This I mention as inexplicable; for such annual resurrections of plants and flowers affect us only as memorials, or suggestions of some higher change, and therefore in connection with the idea of death; yet of death I could, at that time, have had no experience whatever.'<sup>81</sup>

If one were inclined to doubt the age to which he ascribes his recollections just quoted, there is another memory which can be definitely dated by external evidence. He recalls, when little more than two and a half years old, the illumination to celebrate the recovery of George III on 23 April 1788.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *Works*, I, 80, 359, 39.

<sup>81</sup> *Works*, I, 32.

<sup>82</sup> *Life and Manners*, p. 22.



He writes of a couple of later memories, though still from his early childhood, this time of strange impressions gained from books. They are, like his other recollections, elaborated after long years of oblivion; but within the glosses and analyses there is unmistakably a genuine kernel. Thus, in his paper on *Infant Literature*, he tells of an effect of awe and grandeur which he detected in a certain couplet of Phaedrus, drawn from his second Latin Book:

‘Aesopo statuum ingentem posuere Attici;  
Servumque collocarunt eternâ in basi.’

The effect upon his mind of the slave, the pariah — on the one hand being the lowest of human creatures, and on the other being elevated to the grandeur of eternal fame and admiration — gave him his first jubilant sense of the moral sublime. Probably it shows also how the excitement of the time over the struggle for the emancipation of the slaves — the campaign of Clarkson and Wilberforce in the late eighties and early nineties — had entered the Quincey household and the consciousness of the lad of seven or eight.<sup>83</sup>

A further sense of the mysteries of life came to him in the incident which he cites from the story of Aladdin; an incident in which the magician applies his ear to the earth and with miraculous power detects among all the myriad footsteps upon the globe the step of the innocent child who is destined to release the lamp from its imprisoning chamber. The fact that there is no such incident in the *Arabian Nights* at all,<sup>84</sup> suggests that the children ‘made it up,’ or more likely read it in some unidentified version; but the awe which De Quincey felt in the presence of such a mystery shows the imaginative habits of the boy.

## VII

For the child so obviously sensitive and observing, there followed within the narrow interval of three years the ex-

<sup>83</sup> His father, although connected with the West Indian trade in all honourable branches, was one of the conscientious objectors to slave labour, and after the publication of Clarkson's *Essay* and the evidence delivered before the House of Commons, strictly abstained from the use of sugar in his own family. (*Works*, I, 19.)

<sup>84</sup> Axon, *Bookman*, February 1907.

perience of no less than four deaths in the family circle. The first was that of his grandmother Penson, on 16 January 1790. It made little impression upon him. 'But, as she had come to us for the express purpose of dying in her daughter's society, and from illness had lived perfectly secluded, our nursery circle knew her but little, and were certainly more affected by the death (which I witnessed) of a beautiful bird — viz., a kingfisher, which had been injured by an accident.' <sup>85</sup>

The second death was that of his sister Jane, eleven months older than himself; <sup>86</sup> a loss to him less sorrowful than perplexing. 'With my sister Jane's death . . . there was, however, connected an incident which made a most fearful impression upon myself, deepening my tendencies to thoughtfulness and abstraction beyond what would seem credible for my years.' She died in March 1790, when Thomas was less than five years old. 'If there was one thing in this world from which, more than from any other, nature had forced me to revolt, it was brutality and violence. Now, a whisper arose in the family that a female servant, who by accident was drawn off from her proper duties to attend my sister Jane for a day or two, had on one occasion treated her harshly, if not brutally; and as this ill-treatment happened within three or four days of her death . . . naturally there was a sense of awe and indignation diffused through the family. . . . I did not often see the person charged with this cruelty; but when I did, my eyes sought the ground; nor could I have borne to look her in the face; not, however, in any spirit that could be called anger. The feeling which fell upon me was a shuddering horror, as upon a first glimpse of the truth that I was in a world of evil and strife. . . . Henceforward the character of my thoughts changed greatly . . . that incident had a lasting revolutionary power in coloring my estimate of life.' 'Yet,' he goes on, 'in fact, I knew little more of mortality than that Jane had disappeared.' <sup>87</sup> But the subconscious effect of the loss of Jane prepared the child to suffer with unexampled

<sup>85</sup> *Works*, I, 33. In the original form of the paper in which this is told, the death of the kingfisher occurred before Thomas was two years old. He was between four and five when his grandmother died.

<sup>86</sup> Not 'about two years older' as he wrote. (*Works*, I, 33.)

<sup>87</sup> *Works*, I, 33 ff.

violence when, two years later, his best-loved sister died; a violence which was repeated just twenty years later still upon the death of little Kate Wordsworth.

On 2 June 1792, Elizabeth, two years his senior, died after a lingering illness; and the memory of that loss called forth many years afterwards one of his most passionate and beautiful autobiographic papers. She was a singularly brilliant child, with a head declared by a distinguished surgeon, speaking, no doubt as a phrenologist, to be 'the finest in its development of any that he had ever seen.' The bonds between brother and sister were of the closest from their common necessity of loving and being loved.

'I grieved, indeed,' he writes, 'that my sister should lie in bed; I grieved still more to hear her moan;' the disease was hydrocephalus. Naturally enough, Thomas feared no fatal result; he thought, rather, that she would soon be well. Then came the moment 'when the elder nurse awakened me from that delusion, and launched God's thunderbolt at my heart in the assurance that my sister must die.' . . . (Strange, was it not, that it was the nurse and not their mother who should speak the terrible words!) 'Deaf and blind I was, as I reeled under the revelation. . . . All was soon over; and the morning of that day had at last arrived which looked down upon her innocent face, sleeping the sleep from which there is no awaking, and upon me sorrowing the sorrow for which there is no consolation.' In a moment when the house was quiet, he stole into the room where the body lay. As he entered he saw for a second only the window open to the splendour of the noonday sun and summer sky. Then he turned with awe, not fear, to see his sister lying on the bed. And while he stood, a solemn wind began to blow, the saddest sound that ear ever heard; and a trance fell upon him. 'A vault seemed to open in the zenith of the far blue sky, a shaft which ran up for ever. I, in spirit, rose as if on billows that also ran up the shaft for ever; and the billows seemed to pursue the throne of God; but *that* also ran before us and fled away continually. . . . I slept — for how long I cannot say; slowly I recovered my self-possession; and, when I woke, found myself standing as before, close to my sister's bed. I have

reason to believe that a *very* long interval had elapsed during this wandering or suspension of my perfect mind. When I returned to myself, there was a foot (or I fancied so) on the stairs. . . . Hastily, therefore, I kissed the lips that I should kiss no more, and slunk, like a guilty thing, with stealthy steps from the room.' <sup>88</sup>

Even though we may feel that what happened to the lad of seven was not exactly what the man of sixty paints in this passage, we cannot escape believing that the child had at that moment an intense spiritual experience; the death foretold as inevitable, the passion of grief for the first time intensely suffered, the vision — all these certainly made on the sensitive boy an indelible impression. And he tells us with manifest truth that now began a new development in him. 'After her death,' he writes in the original form of this reminiscence, 'habitual gravity (melancholy I cannot call it) and sense of some awful but indefinite presence fell over me; and this I never lost. Had I been a sickly child, it would have produced gloom. As it was, being tolerably healthy, I was generally happy; and the effect of my everlasting commerce with the subjects of death and the grave, showed itself simply in this, that I never played, — and that my mind was peopled with solemn imagery. . . . With me the case arose naturally enough out of my own solitariness.' William, his elder brother, did not come home to stay for two years after the death of Elizabeth; and, as might have been expected, Thomas 'neglected his next younger brother,' Pink. 'Thus,' he goes on, 'I was left to myself; no creature had I to converse with. . . . I, in some sense, was a nympholept: I had caught too early and too profound a glimpse of certain dread realities. Solitude, which I sought by choice, might be said to seek me by necessity; for companions I had none of my own age; I was not allowed ever to go near the servants. And books, which I soon passionately loved, aided all these tendencies.' <sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Works*, I, 37 ff.

<sup>89</sup> *Life and Manners*, pp. 23 ff. In the original form of these reminiscences, he says that his father's funeral was the first he ever attended, so that the passage in the later revision, *The Affliction of Childhood*, describing the effect upon him of the earth falling upon his sister's coffin must be considered as an artistic touch rather than literal fact.

'All day long, when it was not impossible for me to do so, I sought the most silent and sequestered nooks in the grounds about the house, or in the neighboring fields.' And later he adds, 'at this time, and under this impulse of rapacious grief, that grasped at what it could not obtain, the faculty of shaping images in the distance out of slight elements, and grouping them after the yearnings of the heart, grew upon me in morbid excess.' At church during the litany, he would weep at the supplication for all sick persons and young children and, moved by the music of the organ, see visions in the coloured glass — visions repeated again and again in his dreams built up from these same experiences.<sup>40</sup>

The fourth death, that of his father, while it did not strike so close to his heart, had great influence upon his outward life. Thomas Quincey, as a result of his enforced absences, was hardly more than a name to his son when in 1793 he came back for the last time. On an early summer evening, the children gathered on the lawn saw the carriage suddenly emerge out of the dusk with their father lying against white pillows; and upon Thomas flashed another vivid scene connected with death, to be brilliantly recalled many years later; a dramatic foreshadowing of his father's end more sharply etched upon the boy's mind than the actual death itself.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> In the first version of *A Sequel to the Confessions*, after the account of these visions springing from the painted windows, he added: 'The reader must not forget, in reading this and other passages, that, though a child's feelings are spoken of, it is not the child who speaks. I decipher what the child only felt in cipher. . . . I did not as a child, *consciously* read in my own deep feelings these ideas. . . . I, the child, had feelings; I, the man, decipher them. In the child lay the handwriting mysterious to *him*; in me, the interpretation and the comment.' (*Confessions and Suspiria*, Boston, 1851, p. 186n.)

And again, 'The faculty of shaping images in the distance out of slight elements, and grouping them after the yearnings of the heart, aided by a slight defect of the eyes, grew upon me at this time. . . . The idealising tendency existed in the dream theatre of my childhood; but the preternatural strength of its action and coloring was first developed' after he began to take opium. (*Ibid.*, p. 223.)

<sup>41</sup> In the description of his father's home-coming in *Introduction to the World of Strife* (*Works*, I, 57), De Quincey has telescoped two incidents together. In the earlier form ("Early Days," *Life and Manners*, p. 25) he tells of his standing on a summer evening listening for the sound of wheels which should betoken his mother's return. She had been summoned by an express to meet her husband who had broken a blood-vessel. It was some months later before his father returned.

But the end was not yet. 'For some weeks,' De Quincey writes, 'I remember being about him as he lay on the sofa surrounded with West India productions displayed for my amusement. I was aware by something peculiar in the look and aspect of the house, a depression visible on all faces, and a quiet tread, that some speedy catastrophe was approaching: and at length one morning I saw signs which sufficiently indicated that it was then at hand. Dead silence reigned in the house: whispers only audible; and I saw all the women of the family weeping. Soon after, all of us, being then four, able to understand such a scene, were carried into the bed-room in which my father was at that moment dying. Whether he had asked for us, I know not: if so, his senses had left him before we came. He was delirious, and talked at intervals — always on the same subject. He was ascending a mountain, and he had met with some great obstacle, which to him was insurmountable without help. This he called for from various people, naming them, and complaining of their desertion. The person who had gathered us together, raised my father's hand and laid it upon my head. We left the room; and in less than two minutes we heard it announced that all was over.' <sup>42</sup> Thomas Quincey died on 18 July 1793, when his son was a month short of eight years old.<sup>43</sup>

## VIII

DURING the years of his father's absence, De Quincey's mother was, naturally, the dominating power at home. She was an able woman, with a vigorous mind of unusual cultivation; and with a sense of moral responsibility for her own actions

<sup>42</sup> *Life and Manners*, p. 25. In a letter to Dorothy Wordsworth dated 21 June 1812 (Wordsworth MSS.) De Quincey gives a slightly more concrete detail of this scene: 'I was but a child, and had seen too little of him to feel much at his death; but I was greatly affected at hearing him moan out to my mother a few minutes before he died — Oh, Betty, Betty! why will you never come and help me to raise this weight?'

<sup>43</sup> He was buried in St. Anne's churchyard, Manchester. 'The inscription on the memorial stone reads as follows: —

'Under this stone lie the remains of Mrs. Sarah Penson, relict of the late Samuel Penson of London, who died January 16, 1790 aged 69 years. Also Thomas Quincey, merchant, who died July 18, 1793 aged 40 years. Also of Jane Quincey, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Quincey, born September 18, 1786, died March 18, 1790. Also of Elizabeth Quincey, their daughter, who died June 2nd. 1792, aged 9 years.'

and for those of her children which was often to distress both herself and her offspring. She had no sense of humour, no adaptability to meet the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of her strange family; she became constantly more rigid in her religious feeling, with a corresponding increase in her severity of judgments. Right was to her right; wrong, wrong. Obviously her affections were deep; her loyalty to Thomas and Pink through all vicissitudes bear clear evidence to that fact, even though she sought to hide her love behind the veil of duty and conscience. Whenever she took action, she sought to be governed by reasons and motives of the clearest sort; and whenever her action turned out to be unwise in the light of after events, her unwisdom always sprang from the failure to understand the point of view of others. Whether her head was stronger than her heart, it is difficult to determine; but she intended that such should be the case. But one wonders whether her reasonable, severe demeanour was not an attempt to conceal, even from herself, an essential softness of nature. Probably her grand-daughter, Mrs. Bairdsmith, was not far wrong, although she never saw her grandmother, when she wrote, 'Hers was not a Roman firmness.' <sup>44</sup>

She is best known to us in after years when her character had, as it were, stiffened; but even in these earlier days of Greenhay she was not the loving mother to capture the hearts of such delicate and sensitive children as Thomas and Elizabeth, even if she had not been torn by long anxiety for her husband. She was an actor in a slow and inevitable tragedy. Had she been different, she might have gained consolation in her anguish by demonstrative affection for her young brood. As she was, she seems to have steeled herself against the blows of fate, against the dangers lurking, as she saw, in emotional collapse. The result of her conduct and attitude was to make upon her son an impression of hardness, or lack of sympathy, which, whether true or not, evidently had a definite effect upon him. And this effect endured; so that he wrote, apparently late in life, a somewhat severe summary of his impressions of her, worth quoting at length in view of her part in his history for sixty years.

<sup>44</sup> *Memorials*, I, 13.

' It may seem odd, according to most people's ideas of mothers, that some part of my redundant love did not overflow upon mine. And the more so, if the reader happened to know that she was one whom her grown-up friends made the object of idolising reverence. But she delighted not in infancy, nor infancy in her. The very greatness of some qualities in her mind made this impossible. Let me make a sketch of her; for she well merits it. Figure to yourself a woman of admirable manners, in fact as much as any person I have ever known, distinguished by lady-like tranquility and repose, and even by self-possession, but also freezing in excess. Austere she was in a degree which fitted her for the lady president of rebellious nunneries. Rigid in her exactions of duty from those around her, but also from herself; upright, sternly conscientious, munificent in her charities, pure minded in so absolute a degree that you would have been tempted to call her "holy," — she yet could not win hearts by the graciousness of her manner. That quality which shone so brightly in my sister [Elizabeth] and the expansive love which distinguished both her and myself, we had from our father. And a peculiarity there was about my mother which is not found, or anything like it, in one mother out of five hundred. Usually mothers defend their own cubs, right or wrong; and they also think favorably of any pretensions to praise which these cubs may put forward. Not so my mother. Were we taxed by interested parties with some impropriety of conduct? Trial by jury, English laws of evidence, all were forgotten; and we were found guilty on the bare affidavit of the angry accuser. Did a visitor say some flattering thing of a talent or accomplishment by one or other of us? My mother protested so solemnly against the possibility that we could possess either one or the other, that we children held it a point of filial duty to believe ourselves the very scum and refuse of the universe. Yet, with all this absence of indulgent thoughts towards us or any of us, no mother can ever have lived who was more vigilant to see that we received to the last fraction every attention due to our health, to the decorum of our manners, or to the proprieties of our dress. It is as good as a comedy in my feeling when I call back the characteristic scene (characteristic equally of the mother and the simple flock that obeyed her summons) which went on every morning of the year. All of us, for some years six, were marched off or were carried off to a morning parade in my mother's dressing-room. As the mail-coaches go down daily to London to the inspector of mails, so we rolled out of the nursery at a signal given, and were minutely reviewed in succession. Were the lamps of our equipage clean and bright? Were the springs properly braced? Were the linch-pins secured? When this inspection, which was no mere formality,



had travelled from the front rank to the rear, when we were pronounced to be in proper trim, or, in the language of the guards, "All right behind!" we were dismissed, but with two ceremonies that to us were mysterious and allegorical — first, that our hair and faces were sprinkled with lavender-water and milk of roses; secondly, that we received a kiss on the forehead. The mystery in this last instance regarded the place; because we little silly people in the nursery never planted our kisses on foreheads, but sprang right at the lips. That I do not, however, exaggerate the austerity of my mother's character and the awe which it breathed around her, is certain from what I recollect of the deep impression which she produced upon her servants. Except as regarded the waiting at table, she never communicated with them directly, but only through a house-keeper. Sometimes, however, when a feud arose amongst them, it was remembered that in the last resort an appeal lay to "mistress." But rare were the cases in which the final remedy was tried. And as one out of a hundred similar testimonies to this impression, there occurs to me the lively *mot* of a housemaid who, being asked why in a case of supposed wrong she had not spoken to her mistress, replied — "Speak to mistress! Would I speak to a ghost?" " 45

With such a mother to whom he felt it impossible to open his childish heart, with the loss of his beloved sister who had been his confidante and dearest companion, Thomas was thrown in upon himself to nurse his unexpressed and inexpressible grief in solitude and exaggerated pensiveness. And at this moment, his elder brother William, older by some four or five years, was brought home from school to become for three years the dominant influence upon his life. The sudden change from the gentleness of older sisters and younger children to the noise and vigour of a tyrannical elder brother was of necessity a startling revolution in his existence.

## IX

WILLIAM was relatively a stranger to Thomas, so much had the elder been away at school. In an early stage of his career, William had been found wholly unmanageable — in the continued absence of his father from home, we may understand. His genius for mischief amounted to inspiration. But now,

after the father's death, Mrs. Quincey was moved to bring him back to Greenhay, either from motives of needed economy or because she hoped that the association of William and Thomas might benefit both, stirring the one to bookish things and the other to boyish activities. Whatever the reasons, William returned to the family circle, and the World of Strife was introduced.<sup>46</sup>

William looked upon the younger brother with a sort of contempt and proceeded to act, as boys will, in that spirit. 'But it happened . . . that I had a perfect craze for being despised,' wrote De Quincey. 'To me, at that era of life, [contempt] formed the main guarantee of an unmolested repose: and security there was not, on any lower terms, for the *latentis semita vitae*. The slightest approach to any favorable construction of my intellectual pretensions alarmed me beyond measure; because it pledged me in a manner with the hearer to support this attempt by a second, by a third, by a fourth.' He preferred to be thought a 'baby,' an 'idiot,' since only so could he be left in peace. 'Sometimes, indeed, the mere necessities of disputing carried me, before I was aware of my own imprudence, so far up the staircase of Babel, that my brother was shaken for a moment in the infinity of his contempt: and, before long, when my superiority in some bookish accomplishments displayed itself, by results that could not be entirely dissembled, mere foolish human nature forced me into some trifle of exultation at these retributory triumphs.' But Thomas almost always had reason to regret those triumphs; and his brother invariably reverted to his habitual attitude, to Thomas's satisfaction.

But William was not a mere bully. He was 'in all respects a remarkable boy. Haughty he was, aspiring, immeasurably active; fertile in resources as Robinson Crusoe; but also full of quarrel as it is possible to imagine . . . Books he detested, one and all, excepting only such as he happened to write himself. And these were not a few. On all subjects known to man, from the Thirty-nine Articles of our English church, down to pyrotechnics, legerdemain, magic, both black and

<sup>46</sup> The following paragraphs are drawn from De Quincey's 'Introduction to the World of Strife,' *Works*, I, 55 ff.

white, thaumaturgy, and necromancy, he favored the world . . . with his select opinions.'

The arrival of William to bring new life to the nursery group, also introduced a new venture in education for the two older boys. De Quincey claims for himself at the age of eight a considerable knowledge of books. He tells us that in the nursery library there was a 'vast' collection of childish literature. But wide as his range of reading may have been, he had had little, if any, formal education. William must now continue his studies while at home, and it was judged time for Thomas to join him in going daily to be tutored by their guardian, the Reverend Samuel Hall, an arrangement which lasted from early in the autumn of 1793 until late in 1796.

Mr. Hall was at the time a curate at St. Anne's, with a large family and small pay, living at Salford, some two miles from Greenhay. He had early won the friendship and confidence of Thomas Quincey; to such an extent, indeed, that Mr. Quincey had named him in his will as one of his executors and, also, as one of the guardians of his children. Mr. Hall may have been dull, dreadfully dull, as De Quincey says; he may have been without deep religious insight. But he was liberal in thought and, apparently, entirely conscientious. Furthermore, he was a good Latinist, if a feeble Grecian; and under his care, Thomas began his study of the classics — learned Latin effectually and laid the foundations of Greek which he so firmly built upon in the years at Bath. The most serious charge against Mr. Hall is that he did not stimulate Thomas's ambition; but he was not without pedagogic skill, if one can judge by a device of notable fitness for his young pupil: the requirement for the boy to summarize each week from memory, with faithfulness and accuracy, the sermon which Mr. Hall had preached on the preceding Sunday morning. 'I drew, in fact, the deepest benefits from this weekly exercise,' De Quincey writes, 'so that in my third year of practice, I found my abstracting and condensing powers sensibly enlarged.' More than this, however, the exercise, good in itself as training, counteracted in him his constitutional infirmity of mind with its endless reveries and dreamy with-

drawal from the realities of life and forced him to focus his attention upon the sermon, often dull, no doubt, when he would have preferred to see in painted windows and sunlight visions of sorrow and splendour.<sup>47</sup>

Meantime, Mr. Hall was not the only educational force brought to bear upon Thomas; there was William. On the Oxford Road which the boys had to traverse on their two-mile walk to their tutor, was one sole cotton factory, close to a bridge. 'This factory became to us,' wrote De Quincey, 'the *officina gentium*, from which swarmed forth those Goths and Vandals that continually threatened our steps; and this bridge became the eternal arena of combat, we taking good care to be on the right side of the bridge for retreat — *i.e.*, on the town side, or the country side, according as we were going out in the morning, or returning in the afternoon.' The immediate cause of the perennial quarrel with the workers was a mere accident; the efficient cause lay in the aristocratic appearance of the boys.

'It was on an early day of our new *tyrocinium*, or perhaps on the very first, that as we passed the bridge, a boy happening to issue from the factory sang out to us derisively, "Holloa, Bucks!" . . . In the next moment he discovered our boots, and he consummated his crime by saluting us as "Boots, boots!" My brother made a dead stop, surveyed him with immense disdain, [William was thirteen, Thomas eight] and bade him draw near, that he might "give his flesh to the fowls of the air." The boy declined to accept this liberal invitation, and conveyed his answer by a most contemptuous and plebeian gesture, upon which my brother drove him in with a shower of stones.'

Thomas, meanwhile, remained passive. Neither 'Bucks' nor 'Boots' seemed to him grounds for hostilities; the one was offensive, the other based on fact. But his brother soon set him right. First, Thomas owed allegiance to *him* as his

<sup>47</sup> Mr. Hall had been a student at St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge, and had been placed fifth among the Senior Optimes. He had surrendered his fellowship at the Collegiate Church in Manchester because of his repugnance to the Athanasian Creed. In 1794 he became the first rector of the new St. Peter's Church, a position which he held until he died in 1813 (Bardsley, *Memorials of St. Anne's Church*). A memorial is in St. Anne's Church.

commander-in-chief whenever they took the field. Secondly, as the younger son, Thomas owed suit and service to the head of the house. Thirdly, he owed deference to his elder! 'By temperament, and through natural dedication to despondency,' De Quincey goes on, 'I felt resting upon me always too deep and gloomy a sense of obscure duties attached to life, that I never *should* be able to fulfil; a burden which I could not carry, and which yet I did not know how to throw off. Glad, therefore, I was to find the whole tremendous weight of obligations—the law and the prophets—all crowded into this pocket command. . . From this day, therefore, I obeyed all my brother's military commands with the utmost docility.'

The daily battle was usually in the afternoon, when the boys properly placed on the cis-Greenhay side of the bridge waited for the five o'clock bell to bring forth the operatives; with stones at hand, Thomas was placed some forty yards away from William, under exact orders, and with injunctions to indulge in no doubts or quibbling. Quibbling, or 'pettifogulising,' was a charge of William's, based on Thomas's attitude of mind; and not without reason. De Quincey explains: 'True it was that my eye was preternaturally keen for flaws of language, not from pedantic exaction of superfluous accuracy, but, on the contrary, from too conscientious a wish to escape the mistakes which language not rigorous is apt to occasion. . . . Not in order to resist or evade my brother's directions, but for the very opposite purpose—viz., that I might fulfill them to the letter—thus and no otherwise it happened that I showed so much scrupulosity about the exact value and position of his words, as finally to draw upon myself the vexatious reproach of being habitually a "pettifoguliser."' '

On several occasions Thomas was captured by the enemy, let go unscathed, or sent back with kicks and uncomplimentary messages for his brother; in every case to find himself in disgrace with his commander-in-chief. And once in captivity, he was actually picked up and kissed by the girls, an incident mercilessly punished by the commander in galling bulletins issued to the household.

It was not, however, only the terror of the factory war which distressed Thomas. Hardly less was he tormented in the fictitious kingdoms of the boys' imaginative world. Each brother had his imaginary empire — William was the lord of Tigrosylvania, Thomas of Gombroon; and it was with despair that Thomas tried to preserve from encroachment his kingdom against the claims and attacks of the imperial William, by keeping Gombroon remote and poor. If Gombroon was located as far as 75 degrees of latitude from William's capital, suddenly the territory of Tigrosylvania was discovered to extend to its very shores; if Gombroon was peaceful and poverty-stricken, the Tigrosylvanians learned of a rich diamond mine within its borders. But the culmination came when William, filled with the theories of Lord Monboddo that men originally possessed tails, declared that the Gombroonians had tails and advised with scorn that they should wear togas to conceal the fact!

Meanwhile, of course, William was constantly daring Thomas to acts which the latter hated or feared. At their guardian's, Mr. Belcher's, there was a terrible swing, a 'most ambitious swing, ascending,' as De Quincey assures us, 'to a height beyond anything I have since seen in fairs or public gardens. Horror was at my heart regularly as the swing reached its most aerial altitude; for the oily, swallow-like fluency of the swoop downwards threatened always to make me sick. . . But, in defiance of all miserable panic, I continued to swing whenever he tauntingly invited me.' His sensations in that swing grew deep into his being and recur in later dreams. There was but one 'dare' which he declined, namely, to ride a vicious horse.

But the period of this boyish companionship and strife was soon to cease. William was obviously a serious problem for the widow in the midst of her young flock. He had no liking for books; his talent was for drawing. At last the guardians agreed that he should be sent to London to study art with a man distinguished in his day, one de Louthenbourg, an academician and a favourite of George III. Just when William left Greenhay, I do not know; but before he was sixteen he died at de Louthenbourg's house in Hammersmith of typhus

fever. 'It was well that my brother's path in life soon ceased to coincide with my own,' De Quincey writes; 'else I should infallibly have broken my neck in confronting perils which brought me neither honour nor profit, and in accepting defiances, which, issue as they might, won self-reproach from myself and sometimes gaiety and derision from *him*.' And on the side of character the continued influence would have stressed Thomas's qualities of distrust, introspection, and reticence. Yet William left in his mind no sting of resentment; for twenty years later, Thomas named his first son after that same strenuous brother; indeed, he seems to have felt a definite gratitude to William for this brief incursion into his life. 'Well was it for me,' he writes, 'if well it were for me to live at all, that from my continued contemplation of my misery, I was forced to wean myself, and suddenly to assume the harness of life. Else, under the morbid languishing of grief, and of what the Romans call *desiderium* (the yearning too obstinate after one irrecoverable face), too probably I should have pined away into an early grave. Harsh was my awakening; but the rough febrifuge which the awakening administered broke the strength of my sickly reveries through a period of more than two years; by which time, under the natural expansion of my bodily strength, the danger had passed over.'

## X

Two anecdotes illustrate Thomas's tenderness of nature and his place in the household affections. The first concerns the death of a kitten. The incident took place while William was at home and Thomas was being thrown against his will into rough boyish play. One day as the lad returned from his tutor, he found one of the gardeners holding in his hand Thomas's beloved kitten which had just been killed by a young Newfoundland dog. 'It is impossible to describe my grief,' he writes. 'I remember that there was a large coal-stack in the yard. I dropped my Latin books, sat down upon a huge block of coal, and burst into a passion of tears.' To him in his sorrow flocked the servant-maids to comfort him with kisses; until, in turn, responding to the caresses of one of

the maids, he 'threw [his] arms about her neck and kissed *her* also.' <sup>48</sup>

The second incident even more sharply defines his position among the women of the household. It was just before Christmas in 1793, and he was four months beyond his eighth year. He was to be sent alone on a visit to a 'female relative of mature age besides some youthful cousins,' presumably in Boston or the Lincolnshire Fens. He was to have a companion on the way, an unknown young man who was at school near Manchester and who, to find someone to share the expenses of journeying back to his home in Lincolnshire for the holidays, had advertised for a fellow traveller. As the time drew near for departure, Thomas was naturally all excitement; and in memory he paints the early morning start — his being dressed, the thoughts of the dangers on the road lurking in Sherwood Forest, the breakfast by candle light, his lack of appetite, the wait for the chaise and his unknown companion, the visit to his mother to say farewell, the parting advice, soon forgotten. Mrs. Quincey shed upon his cheeks more milk of roses than tears. But it was not his parting with his mother which touched his heart, but the parting with the nursery and kitchen maids 'who gave, and who received, those fervent kisses, which wait only upon love without awe and without disguise.' <sup>49</sup>

Among other elements in the education of Thomas appears the joy he found in music, a joy persistent throughout his life, in college, in London when he was first taking opium, and in later years in Edinburgh and Lasswade. One of his guardians, Thomas Belcher, who had a country house just outside Manchester, took his duties lightly; but, as De Quincey says, 'he washed his hands of us, by inviting us every now and then, to spend a few days at his house. . . . There was a family of sensible children, who were more skilfully trained in their musical studies than at that day was usual. They sang the old English glees and madrigals, and correctly enough for me, who, having at even that childish age a preternatural sensibility to music, had also, as may be supposed,

<sup>48</sup> *Confessions*, Boston, 1851, p. 199.

<sup>49</sup> *Works*, I, 275 ff.



the most entire want of musical knowledge. No blunders could do much to mar *my* pleasure. There first I heard the concertos of Corelli; but, also, which far more profoundly affected me, a few selections from Jomelli and Cimarosa. With Handel I had long been familiar, for the famous chorus-singers of Lancashire sang continually at churches the most effective parts of his chief oratorios. Mozart was yet to come. . . . But, above all, a thing which to my dying day I could never forget, at the house of this guardian I heard sung a long canon of Cherubini's. . . . It was sung by four male voices, and rose into a region of thrilling passion, such as my heart had always dimly craved and hungered after, but which now first interpreted itself, as a physical possibility, to my ear.'

During the last three years at Greenhay, there first came to him the desire and opportunity to buy books; to follow deliberately and not by mere accident, his interest in reading, although, characteristically, the result brought trouble in its train. 'It happened,' he writes in the *Sequel to the Confessions*, 'that I had now, and commencing with my first introduction into Latin studies, a large weekly allowance of pocket-money — too large for my age [8 or 9], but safely intrusted to myself who never spent or desired to spend one fraction of it upon anything but books. But all proved too little for my colossal schemes. . . . Very soon I had run ahead of my allowance, and was about three guineas deep in debt.' Here was his first distress in money matters. He was ashamed to confess it; he was not wise enough to pay off the debt gradually from his three weekly shillings; he had no confidant to advise him. And for three years, he tells us, it hung over his head to torment him, until he found after all that in some way through the regular bills of his mother or of his guardian, it had been paid, all unbeknown to anyone.<sup>50</sup>

Before he was eleven, he had become a skilful Latinist and was writing verses in the manner of Juvenal, some fragments of which he has quoted in the *Sequel to the Confessions*. One poem was written, amusingly enough, in anger at what he thought was interference by his uncle, another guardian, Mr.

<sup>50</sup> *Confessions*, Boston, p. 211.

Gee, in a love affair which Thomas, under nine, was carrying on with his cousin a year younger than himself. If we may trust his memory, the incident shows his precocity. In the most chivalrous sense he was in love with M.; and the proof was that he kissed her glove on any rare occasion when he found it on a table; that he looked for some excuse to be jealous of her; that he tried to quarrel with her for the sheer delight of making up with her again; and that he liked to hold her hand. Thus when he thought that her father sought to check his manifestations of adoration, he broke out into satire.<sup>51</sup>

In these days, also, occurred another incident not without importance. A kindly bookseller on one occasion, knowing, of course, who Thomas was, and that he was a pupil of Mr. Hall, took down from his shelves a copy of Beza's Latin Testament; and opening it to St. Paul's great chapter on the grave and resurrection, asked the boy to translate it for him. Thomas had never seen a Latin version before; but he knew by heart the words of the King James version, so that he was able to read it off, 'with a fluency and effect like some great opera singer uttering a rapturous *bravura*.' And the bookseller in his delight presented him with the volume. Now for some months, Thomas had been finding Latin somewhat of a drudgery; but this happy incident brought him praise, brought him the satisfaction of having shown his powers effectively; and 'never again did any difficulty arise to check the velocity of [his] progress in this particular language.'<sup>52</sup>

If this is the earliest incident which shows his response to, and need of, external stimulus for exertion, it is not the last. Constantly he recognized during his boyhood his need of praise or of competition to spur him on to effort; later he required other stimuli.

<sup>51</sup> *Confessions*, Boston, p. 263.

<sup>52</sup> *Confessions*, Boston, p. 215.

## CHAPTER II

### BATH AND WINKFIELD

1796-1800

**A**FTER the departure of William for London, Thomas and his brother Pink remained with Mr. Hall; daily continuing to go to and from his house. To the casual observer, they must have seemed natural little boys, neither of them bearing any outward signs of the strange fate awaiting him. They were obviously well-to-do, nicely dressed, well bred and giving promise of comfortable and regular lives.

The life at Greenhay was, however, nearly over. Thomas Quincey's death had suddenly changed the family prospects. He had left a fortune of respectable size, with an income of about £1600 a year. It was not large for a family of six children and their mother, but surely enough to enable them to live the life of gentlefolk without undue scrimping. And it was most carefully divided and safeguarded by the will.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Quincey was given the contents of Greenhay outright and one half of all the income from the estate which included Greenhay itself, the warehouse on Market Street, a share in the New Linen Hall in Chester, and an eighth part in the *Isabella Brigantine* of Drogheda. The other half of the income was to go to the maintenance and education of the children; and when each should arrive at the age of twenty-one, the boys were to have one third more than the girls. Looking even farther ahead, Thomas Quincey provided that when his widow should die, her half should be divided in the same proportions — a provision ultimately carried out, but not until 1846 when there were but Thomas and Jane left to share. Furthermore, Mr. Quincey in his foresight for the good of his children added to his will a provision appointing five guardians — Mrs. Quincey, the Rev. Mr. Hall, Henry Gee, Esq., James Entwistle, Esq., and Thomas Belcher, Esq. — the men carefully chosen from his intimate friends. Thomas later on hated the thought of guardians, as he had every reason to

<sup>1</sup> See will of Thomas Quincey in Somerset House, London.

do. To them he came to attribute some of the most bitter and tragic consequences of his long and troubled life.

Meantime the family stayed on at Greenhay until the autumn of 1796. Yet the house, modest as it was, proved to be a heavy drain upon Mrs. Quincey's resources. It had been built for a merchant looking forward to increasing income; and the sudden end of the profits of trade through the death of its owner made the place impossible for her to keep up. Times were bad; so bad, that the prudent testator had counselled in his foreseeing will that the executors should delay selling Greenhay until conditions should be better. For three years, then, the family remained and executors delayed, until Mrs. Quincey, never a patient woman, backed by her coadjutors decided to wait no longer; and Greenhay was advertised for sale at auction. The day of the sale was rainy; the prices of real estate had not improved; and with what Thomas later declared was a sheer lack of business sagacity, the guardians allowed the estate to be knocked down for £2500 — the estate which had cost £6000; and which, if it had been held for a half dozen years longer, might have brought £10,000.<sup>2</sup> So thought De Quincey many years later; but he himself was a poor business man and he was presumably wrong. Besides, at the moment of writing, he was intent on indicting the guardian-executors who, to his mind, had bungled everything they touched.

The sale was on 15 August 1796; and Mrs. Quincey at once removed herself and her three youngest children to Bath, where she took furnished lodgings, storing the Greenhay effects the while. They were the lodgings just vacated by Edmund Burke, who was to die the following year at Beaconsfield.<sup>3</sup> William was in London and Thomas and Richard were left behind in Manchester, to live for some three months with a Mr. Kelsall while they daily trudged for their Latin and Greek to Mr. Hall. Mr. Kelsall at this time was a young man who had for years been in Mr. Quincey's employ, coming to him as a boy and growing up with and into the business. He was a trusted clerk; so much so that in his will Mr. Quincey

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, I, 149; also, *Life and Manners*, Boston, 1851, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, XI, 37.

had suggested that he, under the advice of Mrs. Quincey, might carry on the West India trade for their common advantage.<sup>4</sup> The plan, a testimony to the high regard which Mr. Quincey had for the practical sagacity of his wife, was not carried out; because, no doubt, of the outbreak of the French wars and the growing uncertainty of foreign trade; it also showed Mr. Kelsall's place in Mr. Quincey's regard. Mr. Kelsall's position in Mrs. Quincey's estimation was no less high; for he, during many years, was the trusted agent of the family, handling their funds and giving advice. Later through bad judgment and misfortunes he lost everything he owned, involving to some slight degree the Quincey properties; and died a lonely and pathetic figure. But in 1796 he was happily married to a charming wife; and in their house it was that Thomas and Richard spent the autumn in singularly pleasant circumstances. Many years after, Thomas recalled with delight the atmosphere of love and peace which pervaded the Kelsall household. The Kelsalls were devoted to each other and to their baby; the servants were devoted to their master and mistress; and the two little Quinceys found themselves in surroundings very unlike those of the household of Greenhay, in which affection played so small a part.<sup>5</sup>

These halcyon days, however, were not to last long. Mrs. Quincey soon found that at Bath was an excellent Grammar School, one of those splendid inheritances from the days of Edward VI, which was pre-eminently fitted for Thomas's growing powers. Thus, early in November, he and Pink were called to Bath; and on the sixth Thomas was entered as a regular student, to his evident satisfaction. He discovered, and he has told us emphatically, that the Bath Grammar School was a 'great school' and that the headmaster was a 'ripe' scholar.<sup>6</sup> His enthusiasm was due, no doubt, to the fact that for the first time he was in active competition with other boys; and partly, also, to his finding in Mr. Mor-

<sup>4</sup> The will does not mention Kelsall by name in this connection; but 'my principal clerk' is certainly Mr. Kelsall.

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, III, 244.

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, I, 151; and *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, ed. Garnett (1885), p. 193, quoting the *Conversations of Woodhouse* in 1821.

gan, the headmaster, an unexpected admirer. Because of Thomas's indifferent Greek, he was not at first placed directly under Mr. Morgan but under the second master. Very soon, however, his remarkable Latin verse came to Mr. Morgan's attention; and, as he tells us, 'suddenly, I was honored as never was man or boy since Mordecai the Jew.' He was weekly paraded for distinction at the supreme tribunal of the school. Mr. Morgan found the verses good, as, no doubt, they were; but he had a dull upper class, and it delighted him to hold up as a model to these lads of seventeen and eighteen the work of a boy of eleven or twelve. Nor did he twit them by halves. Thomas many years afterwards tells us of his often observing Mr. Morgan pointing him out with his cane to the boys in his upper class, particularly when they brought up their verses to him. The boy was never inclined to underestimate his own powers; and this public praise must have given him with his youth and his diminutive size exquisite pleasure. Mr. Morgan, scholar as he was, showed questionable judgment in such laudations for his own purposes at the risk of harming the brilliant boy; but Thomas liked it.<sup>1</sup>

The upper class, however, did not; their resentment was bound to be expressed. One day one of the older boys with a not too heavy blow upon the shoulder asked Thomas 'What the devil he meant by bolting out of course and annoying other people?' And a warning followed that he had better look to himself and write worse verses for the future, or else . . . ! But the little Thomas, proud of his importance and of his fame in the school, was not to be intimidated. Tiny though he might be, he was no coward; gentle though he might seem, he was tough. The older boys went the wrong way to work. Thomas wrote better verses than ever; defiance became for him a matter of self-respect. Yet, he tells us, had they but spoken with the kindness and friendliness for which he was hungry, and so have given him a compensatory pride in the consideration of the older boys even greater than his pride in his verses, he would have been entirely ready to surrender. He detested, he tells us later, distinctions connected with the mortification of others. Whether he was aware of

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, I, 152; Garnett, l.c.

that detestation then, I do not know; but quiet and freedom from strife he did prefer to anything short of his own personal dignity. They chose strife, and the choice was theirs. He went on writing good verse until the illness which caused his withdrawal from the school.<sup>8</sup> The elder lads, like all good English boys, admired pluck. After all, this new boy was not to blame if his work was praised and paraded by Mr. Morgan. So he was left alone, and even by some of the boys he was cultivated, very likely in a more or less humorous way, and invited to their homes. Some of his public enemies became his private friends. Thus he won the battle, and his pride and self-satisfaction were doubly established.

While his excellence in Latin was bringing him both sweet and bitter, he was making great strides in Greek. He found in the school what he had not found in his guardian's teaching, a stimulus to exertion, and by the time he was thirteen he wrote Greek with ease; at fifteen he not only composed Greek verses in lyric measures, but he could 'converse' in Greek fluently and without embarrassment.' He acquired this rare accomplishment, not as a result of the direct teaching of the school, but as a result of his own enthusiasm and his own initiative, by daily reading off the newspapers into the best Greek he could furnish *ex tempore*. He was a natural linguist, to be sure, but he was no less a born student. His method was to ransack his memory — phenomenally retentive always — and his invention for 'all sorts and combinations of periphrastic expressions, as equivalent to modern ideas, images, relations, etc.' Greek, thus, became a living language to him. 'That boy,' said Mr. Morgan on one occasion to a friend, 'could harangue an Athenian mob better than you or I could address an English one.'<sup>9</sup> Surely, Mr. Morgan was justified in feeling pride in his pupil; and Thomas in after years could in turn write that Mr. Morgan was 'the only one of all his tutors whom I loved or revered.' As a matter of fact, Mr. Morgan alone of all the tutors De Quincey ever had fully appreciated his powers; perhaps he was the only one who had enough scholarship to recognise the astonishing brilliance of the boy. Certainly he alone gave

the praise which De Quincey so much coveted; and since the careful avoidance of anything like praise at home was part of his mother's domestic régime and life there was reduced to the simple terms of mere duty, the praise which he received with so much delight merely satisfied a normal craving. It may have puffed him up; but on the other hand it gave him the self-confidence he needed. And after all it did not make him a prig.

At the end of two years and some months, an accident befell him, slight in itself, but far-reaching in its consequences. Thomas was hit on the head by a cane — one of the canes so necessary in the pedagogy of the early nineteenth century — and was literally knocked out for weeks. By good fortune, the incident remains to us recorded in a letter to his younger sister, Mary, who was away from home at school in Bristol. The boyish note with its good-natured humour, its childishness, its entire naturalness, is a valuable document in proof that he had not been spoiled by Mr. Morgan and his ways. It deserves quoting at length:

Bath, Green Park Buildings East, No. 6.  
Tuesday Morning, March 12th, 1799.

My Dear Sister,

Once more after a long campaign — after 'bella, horrida bella' — I return to the arts of peace. Don't you think this is a fine metaphor? Well, I suppose you would like to hear how this war first broke out? This day six weeks as we were up saying, Mr. M. was called out, and so forsooth *little*, or rather *big Mounseer* Collins must jump into the desk. It happened that little Harman minor wanted his hat, which hung up over Collins's head. Wilbraham asked for the cane to reach it him, which Coll. refused, and at the same time to give a little strength (I suppose) to his refusal, and to enforce his authority as a *master*, endeavoured to hit him on the shoulder (as *he* says); but how shall I relate the sequel? On poor Ego did it fall. Say, Muse, what could inspire the cane with such a direful purpose? But not on my shoulder, on my *pate* it fell — unhappy patel worthy of a better fate! Do you see that *pate* and *fate* rime, ay? However, I went on with my lesson when Mr. M. returned. As soon as I came home my mother sent for Mr. Grant; about three o'clock he came. I was then shaved on the place, and bled with six leeches; and two of the old jockies were so fond of my head that they staid on for three hours, and



would not have departed even then, had not Mr. Grant (who came again at nine o'clock) flogged them off with some salt. Next morning I was bled again by the same number. For three weeks I neither read, nor wrote, nor talked, nor eat meat, nor went out of the back drawing-room, except when I went to bed. In the fourth week I read for a *quarter of an hour per day!* and eat a little meat; but I did not write. I now do everything as I used to do, except dancing, running, drinking wine. I am not to go to school till Easter.

My mother wishes to know whether onny of the *little Innocents* are coming to Bath; because she would wish you to come with them. I should suppose old Madam Richardson or Ingleby, or some of those old jockies, will come, and then you might take a Saturday-afternoon coach and come to tea; so write as early as you can. I believe you will be in time for Mademoiselle's ball, which was put off (as I suppose) on my account.

I was introduced last Thursday night to young Lord Westport (Lord Altamont's only child), and on Sunday I dined with him at his house at Lansdown. He is a very nice boy, about my size. My mother will call upon Mr. and Mrs. Grace (*N. B.* Mr. Grace is his tutor), and invite them and Lord W. to our house, where I shall have the opportunity of introducing him to you. Dr. Mapleton and Mr. Grant have left off coming to visit me. My mother desires her love to you. Mrs. Pratt continues to grow better; she has no complaint, but is still unable to walk even upstairs without help. She goes out every day in a chair. *N. B.* They have a gang of robbers in Manchester. Mr. Kelsall's warehouse was attempted, but John C[ockson] called the watchman, who drove them off. Some of the new books are come — viz., 'Asiatic Researches' (Sir William Jones' work), Goldsmith's *Histories of Greece and England*, Milner's 'Ecclesiastical History,' 'Rambler,' Hoole's 'Orlando Furioso,' Hoole's 'Tasso,' Venn's 'Duty of Man,' Ogden's 'Sermons,' &c. —

Believe me, your affectionate sister,  
Tabitha Quincey.<sup>10</sup>

This is the first bit of actual, strictly contemporary evidence we have in De Quincey's life uninterpreted by later analysis and comment; all that has gone before, and much that follows, comes from that most prejudiced witness, his later self. The letter is revealing and reassuring. Thomas was thirteen and a half; Mary was eleven and something. This accounts

for his writing down to her. But he does it all with charming and affectionate humour. He must have been a delightful elder brother. The family relationships between the Quincey children were always close and tender. Whatever the idiosyncrasies of Thomas and his brothers the boys were strongly attached to their sisters and to each other.

As to the accident itself, it was a sharp blow, no doubt. It took him on the head and he was frightened. He tells us in his memoirs that at this time he was 'always under a nervous panic for his head,'<sup>11</sup> fearing, perhaps, lest he too should suffer from the hydrocephalus from which his sister Elizabeth had died. And if, as seems probable, he had been suffering from headache, he might well have been alive to the possibilities. At least, he tells us that his nervousness led him to exaggerate his internal feelings without meaning to do so, and misled his medical attendants. But one way or another, the blow kept him under for three full weeks, unable, or not permitted, to talk, or read—or eat meat! And it ended his career at the Bath Grammar School.

It is worth noting in the letter, that Thomas was unable to run or to dance; and that the ball (Mademoiselle's ball) was put off, as he supposes, on his account. It proves that he was taking dancing lessons. And the thought that he was in the habit of running reassures us who are a bit alarmed at his astonishing Latin verses and his Greek conversation! The list of books which he announced with obvious joy was solid food:—*Asiatic Researches*, *Ecclesiastical History*, *Sermons*, the *Duty of Man*! Here is seen the influence of the Evangelicalism of Mrs. Quincey and her friend, Mrs. Pratt; yet he speaks as if he were planning to read them—with *Orlando Furioso*, and Tasso thrown in. We know elsewhere that he was reading *Paradise Lost* now for the first time. And he was only thirteen and a half.

Mrs. Quincey, however, saw signs which worried her. She took the illness as a God-sent opportunity to break with the Grammar School. Mr. Morgan was naturally interested in Thomas's condition after the accident; he was also eager to have him return to school. Thus was it that he, and his

<sup>11</sup> *Works*, I, 159.

second master, Mr. Wilkins, his son-in-law, and a Captain Bowes called upon Mrs. Quincey when Thomas was recovering, to express concern and hope that he would soon be back at work. Mr. Morgan requested earnestly, in terms most flattering to Thomas, that the boy might remain with him — and this, in the presence of Thomas himself! Little did the headmaster understand Mrs. Quincey, who instead of being moved by maternal pride, was shocked that Thomas should hear compliments on his work.<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Quincey refused to allow him to return to school; giving, apparently, no reasons, but to the anguish of Thomas standing firm in her refusal.

But there was another reason which swayed Mrs. Quincey against the Grammar School — a reason vague to us, but potent. Young Bowes, a friend of Thomas's, apparently the son of the Captain who was the third in the delegation which made the futile call, had in some unknown way offended Mrs. Pratt, the dear friend of Mrs. Quincey; and at the moment of offence, Thomas had been in his company. Thomas was innocent, it was admitted; but he *was* with Bowes at the time, and Bowes was no fit companion for him. Here was the other reason which Mrs. Quincey did not give forth. Thomas could only guess why he was not to return to school. A year later he wrote to his mother that so far as he could see the reason why he was not then back at Bath Grammar School was the affair of Mrs. Pratt.<sup>13</sup> Many years later he made another guess, namely that Mr. Morgan praised his work. But the whole incident, which turned his future towards the, for him, sinister Manchester Grammar School, illustrates Mrs. Quincey's unfortunate method of dealing with her son in complete disregard of his growing powers and his passionate independence.

During the rest of the spring, Thomas was kept at home with tutors. Of them we know nothing, except for one shadowy and pathetic figure of a French tutor who, according to a family tradition, tried to win the hand of Mrs. Quincey, and who introduced Thomas to a number of French

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, I, 160.

<sup>13</sup> Page, I, 60; Bairdsmith MSS. (hereinafter written BS. MSS.). See also, the letter of Mrs. Q. to Thomas of 14 February 1800 in *Memls.*, I, 19.

*émigrés* who were swarming in Bath in 1799. But the arrangements were temporary; and in the autumn, Thomas was sent away to Winkfield, to the Academy of the Reverend Edward Spencer, vicar of the parish, whose chief recommendation was his religious character. Quite obviously, then, if his intellectual precocity worried his mother, his moral and religious state actually alarmed her.

The school at Winkfield was a small establishment of some twenty boys of all ages to which Pink and the youngest brother, Henry, had been sent, presumably when Pink first came from Manchester. Thomas was very fond of his brothers, especially of Pink; but to be sent to Winkfield was for him humiliation after the joys of the Bath Grammar School. Moreover, Mr. Spencer was no scholar; and it is unfortunate for a boy to feel himself superior in learning to his master, as Thomas observed later in speaking of his next teacher at the Manchester Grammar School. Furthermore, there was no worthy competition at Winkfield. Thomas was from the start far and away the leading boy there, with every inducement to loaf. He was a healthy lad, was popular among the boys, and was generous in helping them with their Ovid and Virgil. He is reported to have been active in inventing a game of war between the Greeks and Trojans, in which his 'beauteous brother' Pink played the part of Paris while he himself played that of Odysseus. With his charming manners and quiet ways he became the special favourite of the two Miss Spencers, daughters of the master, who seem to have played a pleasant part in the school life; and who helped him and two Grinfield brothers in editing a weekly school paper, known as *The Observer*. Thomas is reported to have written among other things some bad verses on the challenge of a neighbouring school to play a match: —

' Since Ames' skinny school has dared  
To challenge Spencer's boys,' etc. .

They are thoroughly boyish and unclassical.<sup>14</sup> A much more interesting product of his pen here was a translation of an Ode of Horace, I, 22,<sup>15</sup> in competition for one of three prizes

<sup>14</sup> Page, I, 44; Garnett, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, XIV, 368 ff.

offered by the conductors of a London periodical called *The Juvenile Library*, to be competed for by boys anywhere in the country under fifteen or sixteen. Thomas's version won third prize; the first was carried off by the young Leigh Hunt. But Thomas's verses were good; even today they read well; they are firm, polished, and lyrical. The success of the piece was a school triumph and gave Thomas much satisfaction at the moment and for some time afterwards; perhaps his success even fired him with the desire to gain fame as a poet. But the chief result of the Winkfield experience was to increase his feeling of intellectual superiority and to relax his steady impulse to excel.

Throughout his years at Bath and Winkfield, such records as we have show that his introspection had largely disappeared; and that association with boys had restored to him, or developed in him, a natural boyishness kept fresh by his sense of humour and normal activities, even if he was becoming more and more aware of his own unusual gifts.

### CHAPTER III

## IRELAND AND LAXTON

1800

#### I

ON THURSDAY, 7 March 1799, Thomas was introduced at Bath to Lord Westport, the only child of Lord Altamont and later a friend of Lord Byron, a boy some two or three years younger than himself but of about his size.<sup>1</sup> On the next Sunday, Thomas dined at Lansdown with Lord Westport; and Mrs. Quincey called upon Mr. and Mrs. Grace, (Mr. Grace was Lord Westport's tutor) and invited them to her house. There was apparently some further intercourse during the spring; but Thomas went to Winkfield for the autumn term, and Westport went to Eton. A year later, Thomas received an invitation from Lord Altamont through Mr. Grace to go with Westport to Ireland for a summer holiday. For Lord Westport it was to mean an older, not a larger, boy for companion who should in some perhaps rather casual way direct studies and reading; for Thomas it was to mean travel, new experiences in a high rank of society, and freedom from school and domestic repression.

Thomas was a scholar-gentleman, well bred; with manners, learning, and conversation. He was chosen, not on the grounds of friendship, but because he would be a good influence, a safe and perhaps inspiring companion. No close friendship sprang up between the boys — their respective ages would hardly have fostered such. Lord Altamont, on the other hand, conceived a warm interest in Thomas, and for a year or two kept up an irregular correspondence with him which finally ceased because of De Quincey's indifference.

The invitation was accepted; Thomas was delighted, for he had a strong 'desire to visit Ireland';<sup>2</sup> and the time for starting was fixed for the middle of July 1800. Thomas trav-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, I, 162n.

<sup>2</sup> *Page*, I, 47.

elled to Eton to join Lord Westport — the Bath coach passed through Slough within a short distance of Mr. Grace's house — and got his first glimpse of the school which only two years later he was to revisit under far different auspices.

The run from Bath to Eton took twelve hours; and when Thomas arrived, 'Lord Westport had gone with his tutor to a fête given by the Queen at Frogmore. Thither [he] immediately followed them,'<sup>3</sup> and after staying a little in the ball-room and walking about the gardens with Westport and Lord Percy (the Duke of Northumberland's son) [he] returned to Eton.' He was in no court costume, and his mother later remonstrated with him. But he reassured her. 'I certainly *did* go there in my travelling dress, but then my travelling dress was a very good one (much better than what Lord Westport had on), and my boots were cleaned. Mr. Grace thought I was dressed quite well enough. Besides, I hardly saw 5 persons in the garden; for the ball had begun then, and the ball-room was so crowded, that it was impossible for any person to see what I was dressed in.'<sup>4</sup>

Next day the boys and the tutor started for a visit to Westport's grandmother, Lady Howe, at Porters, near London. To reach there, they had to pass through the city; and for the first time Thomas had a glimpse of 'the Nation of London.' Three hours were all the boys had to see the sights; and tossing a coin to decide whether they were to visit Westminster or St. Paul's, they were directed to St. Paul's. More than by all else, Thomas was impressed by the whispering gallery. His memory of it recurs in the *Confessions*: 'Standing beneath the dome . . . I, having my previous impressions of awe deepened by these solemn trophies of chance and change amongst mighty nations' — the captured flags pompously floating in the nave — 'had suddenly been surprised by a dream . . . in which a thought that often had persecuted me figured triumphantly.' This thought turned upon the fatality that must often attend an evil choice. 'This sentiment of nervous recoil from any word or deed that could not be recalled had suddenly been re-awakened on that

<sup>3</sup> BS. MSS. Letter to his sister Jane, 3 September 1800; *Memls.*, I, 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Memls.*, I, 34; BS. MSS.

London morning by the impressive experience of the Whispering Gallery' <sup>5</sup> — where the lightly spoken word at one side swells to a roar upon the other. The sudden 'dream' which fell upon him — or flash of thought as to the allegorical significance of the awesome echo — magnified that morning visit. <sup>6</sup>

At Porters they found Lady Howe, her daughter Lady Altamont, and a Lord Morton, the only gentleman present. Lord Morton 'took a particular interest in literature,' writes De Quincey, 'and it was, in fact, through *his* kindness, that, for the first time in my life, I found myself somewhat in the position of a "lion."' The occasion was the recent publication of De Quincey's translation of the Horatian Ode. Lord Morton declared that De Quincey should have been the winner of the contest: and as 'the ladies of the family were much influenced by [Lord Morton's] opinion, I thus came, not only to wear the laurel in their estimation, but also with the advantageous addition of having some injustice. I was not only a victor, but a victor in misfortune.' <sup>7</sup>

The visitors spent but a single night at Porters, and returned to Eton for two nights; when they again saw royalty at the Queen's levee at Frogmore. It was probably at this time that De Quincey had the chance interview with the King. According to his story, Westport and he were throwing stones into a little lake, and Westport was practising a peculiar twirl with a shilling, when he suddenly turned the head of the coin towards his companion to indicate that the King was approaching. The King stopped and spoke to the boys; and in the course of his conversation inquired about De Quincey's family with its French name. Were they Huguenots come into England after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes? Here was a question which touched Thomas's pride, and he assured His Majesty that they had come to England with William the Conqueror. 'How do you know that?' asked the King. And Thomas assured him that the name is often

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, III, 296.

<sup>6</sup> In the essay *The Nation of London*, which gives an account of this first visit to London, there is no mention of this episode. This fact, however, in no way discredits its truth.

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, I, 192.



mentioned in the chronicle of Robert of Gloucester.<sup>8</sup> On Saturday morning at six o'clock, the boys and Mr. Grace in a post-chaise, set forth for Holyhead and Ireland, by way of Oxford, Stratford, and Birmingham.

Beginning with 22 July 1800, we have a series of very long and detailed letters from De Quincey to his mother and sisters, giving full accounts of his observations and experiences. The style, if a little stiff and self-conscious, is admirable, with skilful evolution and sweep of sentence, quite in advance of that of the ordinary boy of fifteen. It reveals pride in his position as companion to a young lord, and above all delight in his intellectual powers, in line with his satisfaction at being lionised at Porters and with his speaking up to the King. If he unbends a little in the letters to his sisters, he still keeps his dignity and air of superiority. There has been a great change since he wrote that boyish letter to his sister from Bath. The substance as well as the style has become mature.<sup>9</sup>

The journey to Ireland was not merely an undistinguished holiday. It coincided by chance with a moment of historic importance in the struggle between England and Ireland. In 1798 had occurred a bitter rebellion aided by French expeditions into the north-west of the island; and when this had been crushed, after months of barbarous violence, the proposal was made to abolish the Irish Parliament. In 1800 Lord Castlereagh bribed and cajoled the Parliament on St. Stephen's Green to vote away its legislative independence and to consent to union with Great Britain. It was at this exact moment that De Quincey reached Dublin; and as a guest of the family of an Irish peer, he had the opportunity to be present at the last meeting of the House of Lords, and to see with his own eyes the conferring of honours upon Irish members which were the rewards of their votes.<sup>10</sup>

On August 1 he was in the House of Lords when the Union Act was passed; and again on the next day when twenty-eight peers were elected as members to the English Parliament, of

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, I, 163 ff. It is curious that Thomas did not mention this incident in the letters home which give an account of his Frogmore experiences.

<sup>9</sup> BS. MSS. Only partly printed by Japp.

<sup>10</sup> BS. MSS. Letter of August 12.

whom Lord Altamont was one. On the sixth he was present at the Castle when Lord Altamont was invested as a Knight of the Order of the Blue Ribbon and was duly introduced to the Lord Lieutenant. On the eleventh came the installation at St. Patrick's Cathedral; and again Thomas was present, one of a fortunate two hundred and fifty to crowd into the small church. There he sat in company with Lord and Lady Castle-reagh, and met Lord and Lady Conyngham, who invited him to visit them at Slaine. A lady with his party asked him a question, and his answer attracted the attention of Lord Grey who was standing near and who inquired if his name was not Quincey. 'On my answering "Yes," "Oh, sir," said he, "you're a young countryman of mine, and so we must shake hands."' Later, after the ceremonies, he had a card to watch a grand dinner at the Castle; but he wrote his mother, 'As I had no inclination to see a hundred lords stuffing and getting drunk, I gave my ticket away.' Perhaps in this last sentence he was playing up to his evangelical mother; but he was certainly in the thick of things and moving in high aristocratic circles.

Apart from the festivities, however, the boys were leading a regular life. They got up in the morning between half-past four and six. 'I,' wrote Thomas, 'read the Bible before breakfast and Lord Westport writes and ciphers. We breakfast with Lord Altamont, then read again, then ride and bathe until about two o'clock when we dine. . . . In the afternoon, read and write, and Westport plays with his cousins. At about seven o'clock we sup on bread and milk and fruit (which is also our breakfast) and at nine go to bed. I am now reading "Park's Travels" and "Mallet du Pan." The former I am just finishing; but of "Mallet du Pan" I have only read the three first numbers, containing the "History of the Helvetic League and Liberty." However, what I *have* read, I have read with great attention, and I am abridging it, as I do most books with which I am much pleased. "Ras-selas" has been my bosom friend since I left Bath. Lord A. lent me another book which, I dare say you have read: "History of the Campaigns of 1796 in Germany and Italy." I read it with maps, and by that means get a pretty accu-

rate knowledge of the geography of those countries. As Largeau [Westport's French servant] is constantly talking French to us, I am considerably improved, I think, in that language, and am able to speak it with great ease. I have two Greek books here, so that I am advancing in it, and by teaching Lord Westport every day to make verses, I keep up my Latin.' And he added, 'I am very well *indeed*, owing principally, I suppose, to the change of air, sea bathing, and drinking no tea.'

But the destination of the boys was Westport,<sup>11</sup> in the extreme west of Ireland on Clew Bay in Connaught; and after the ceremonies and business were over in Dublin, at the end of about three weeks, they travelled westward by canal and post. One letter is largely occupied with recording the journey, the stops on the way at the houses of Lord Altamont's friends — at Lord Tullamore's at Charleville; at the Archbishop of Tuam's. The narrative is vivid with its accounts of the chaise which was almost breaking down, and of the 'poor, lean, miserable scarecrows' which dragged it; of Thomas himself being urged to write out his famous translation of Horace that one of the gentlemen might read it aloud to the company assembled at the Archbishop's; of Westport itself, the large and handsome house, with its library; 'as to *quantity* it is inferior to ours in Bath: and as to *quality*, it is the worst I ever saw' — a condition due to the recent raids by French soldiers who carried off everything of value. But there is almost no description of scenery; and the letters are entirely objective.

Thomas was keenly interested in the details of the recent rebellion — he later wrote long accounts of it. But in one of the letters is a paragraph which may give a sample of his interest and, incidentally, show the edge of his mind in these fast-ripening months when he was not yet sixteen.

'As to the Rebellion in Ireland, the English, I think, use *the amplifying*, and the Irish *the diminishing Hyperbole*; the former view it with a *magnifying Glass*, the latter with a *Micro-*

<sup>11</sup> 'Westport is not put down in many of the old Maps, but it is situated exactly in the spot marked Newport in them, at the eastern extremity of Colen Bay and due west of Castlebar; its distance from Dublin is 125 Irish miles.' (Letter from Mr. Grace. *Mems.*, I, 24 ff.)

*scope.* In England I remember, we heard such horrid accounts of Murders and Battles and Robberies, and here everybody tells me the country is in as quiet a state as England and *has* been so for some time past. What makes me suspect the truth of these "smooth-tongued Messengers" is that the Rebellion, even at its greatest height they affect to treat with Indifference, and speak of it as we should of a Birmingham riot. I know, in England I used to hear people talking of it as of a *bloody Civil War*, and the rebel troops were considered, I thought, *a formidable army* whereas here they are termed "*merely straggling Banditti*" "who unroofed a few cabbins and took away some cattle." I often hear persons making such remarks as these: "And indeed the rebels were come into the town and so I thinking they *might probably* be *troublesome* if I stayed, and therefore determined to ride off *after* breakfast, for really many persons of my acquaintance *I do assure es* had their Trunks taken away on the Road."'

On the packet-boat to Dublin and on the canal-boat on his way to Westport occurred a couple of incidents which give some idea of the boy's charm. He wrote in his letters home of meeting Lady Conyngham on the packet-boat. 'Her ladyship who sat the whole time in her coach, seeing me sitting on deck reading, called me to the coach window, where she talked with me about five minutes, and then made me come into the coach and stay the remainder of the day with her. She conversed with me for above eight hours, and seemed a very sensible woman.' And again reverting to the incident, he wrote, she talked 'very sensibly (at least I thought so) about *Zimmermann on Solitude* and many other Authors English and French.' He later discovered from his mother's reply that Lady Conyngham did not have too good a reputation, and he commented sapiently, 'As to Lady Conyngham's *Reputation*, I was rather suspicious of its Quality from the freedom with which she talked to the Gentlemen on deck, and the familiarities which passed between her and a Capt. Marlow.'<sup>12</sup>

On the canal-boat occurred another meeting with a woman, whom De Quincey in the same way captivated by his conversation and manners — an incident which left a deep impress upon him. This lady was Miss Blake, a sister of the

<sup>12</sup> BS. MSS.; in part in *Mems.*, I, 38.

Countess of Errol, and sister-in-law of the Constable of Scotland. De Quincey tells the story at great length and with much embroidery in his essay *Premature Manhood*; the letters give only a brief account. While the canal-boat was leisurely moving westward, Lord Westport's identity got abroad among the passengers, and a woman of forty, 'a wit, a blue-stocking and a leader of the *ton* in Dublin and Belfast,' made up to him. Thomas was snubbed as an 'humble friend' — Thomas who had been made so much of by Lord Morton, Lord Altamont, the Archbishop of Tuam, Lady Conyngham, — and he found his position humiliating. Then, like an angel in Dante, appeared upon the scene the lovely Miss Blake, and the situation changed. Thomas was drawn into the conversation and shone. He was again the centre of admiration, 'the lion of the company which had previously been most insultingly facetious at [his] expense.' Miss Blake was certainly most friendly, and she desired him to call upon her when she went to Bath, where she expected to spend the winter.

De Quincey was impressed. 'Now first it struck me that life might owe half its attractions and all its grace to female companionship.' He gazed at her in admiration, and she blushed. 'That blush, evanescent as it was, — the mere possibility that I, so very a child, should have called up the most transitory sense of bashfulness or confusion upon any female cheek, first — and suddenly as with a flash of lightning penetrating some utter darkness — illuminated to my own startled consciousness, never again to be obscured, the pure and powerful ideal of womanhood and womanly excellence.' And from that day, 'I was an altered creature, never again relapsing into the careless irreflective mind of childhood.' His 'premature manhood' was upon him, suddenly called into being by this eventful summer.<sup>18</sup>

There is one other little anecdote which illustrates the kindness underlying his manners. Mrs. Burgess, a friend of Mrs. Quincey, had asked him to see whether the brother of one of her servants, a common soldier, was still quartered at Westport. Unfortunately he did not know Molly's last name,

<sup>18</sup> *Works*, I, 324 ff.

nor the name of her brother's regiment; so he wrote home inquiries in order that he might look up the young man.<sup>14</sup>

While Thomas was at Westport, his mother in her letters raised the question which must have been broached before he left Bath, of his school future. Mrs. Quincey objected to the Bath Grammar School. But if not that, what school should it be? She proposed Eton, for now with the Westport connexion Eton might be desirable. But Thomas objected, and through pages of closely reasoned argument he defended his thesis. Eton subverted all morals. Westport who a year before 'possessed one of the most amiable dispositions I ever knew' was now spoiled. His character 'is in ruins, he curses and swears and blasphemes in the most shocking manner,' and yet he is 'reckoned quite virtuous at Eton.' Moreover, 'anyone who should *attempt* to differ from the rest, who should express the least disapprobation of their Plans, or not wholly consent to them, and join *in* them, would be *literally* tormented to death.' And Thomas told some terrible tales to support his case. Then he added, 'My situation as a Boy on the foundation would be still more miserable.'<sup>15</sup> Clearly he was not seeking an aristocratic school. He may have inclined to intellectual priggishness at this period, but he was no snob. The Eton plan was dropped henceforth.

Then he proceeded to set forth what he wanted. 'As for any private School, if you knew what a dislike I have to them, how miserable I feel at the thought of going to one,' — he is expressing his feelings toward Winkfield — 'you would not, I think, wish me. It is not for any particular Inconveniences which are *generally* met with at private Schools that I abhor them so much, it is for a fault (at least in *my* eyes a *fault*) which cannot be remedied, which is essential to the very nature of the school, I mean its *being* private. Few private Schools, I should think, are much superior, even in point of learning, to Mr. Spencer's. But the thing which makes me most unhappy at a private school is, there being no Emulation, no Ambition, nothing to contend for, no honours to excite one. This was exactly the case at Mr. Spencer's. I

<sup>14</sup> BS. MSS.

<sup>15</sup> BS. MSS.; 20 August 1800.

was at the head of the school the whole time I was there. No one, but myself, could make Verses, and all those kind of things, but then I had no one to contend with, nor anything higher to aspire to. The consequence was that my powers entirely flagged. My mind became quite dormant in comparison with what it was at Bath Grammar School. I had no one to praise me, to spur me on, or to help me. Nobody (except the Boys) knew I was at the top of the School. With them it was considered no merit to be Head-Boy, and *had* it, I should have derived but little pleasure from the applause of those who with few exceptions, were nearly approaching to Idiots. . . . In short it *was* and always *will* be as impossible to exert myself as much at a private as in a Publick School, as it would be for a person running for his own amusement to go as quick as if he were running a race, or flying from his pursuers. At a private School I have little to hope from "Censure or from Praise." If then you let me go to *any* Publick School, what can be better than the Bath one. The Plan pursued there everyone allows to be incomparable.' He closed thus: 'Everything you desire [of] me I will do, and only ask for that one thing, to go to the Grammar School.' <sup>16</sup> The matter was not settled, however, until he had returned to England.

On Monday, 8 September 1800, the visit to Westport came to an end. The summer — very important to Thomas — had been a success. He had seen high society, been made much of, had grown in poise and mental stature, had become 'premature.' And Lord Altamont was more than satisfied. In letters to Thomas later on he begged him to return to Westport, and assured him that his son had 'profited by his example.' <sup>17</sup> The boys returned to Dublin and crossed by the packet to Park Gate, travelled by coach to Birmingham, and there parted. Westport went on to Eton; Thomas found a letter awaiting him at Birmingham telling him that his sister was visiting Lady Carbery at Laxton, Northamptonshire, and that he was expected to join her there. He went thither be-

<sup>16</sup> BS. MSS.; Page, I, 56 ff.

<sup>17</sup> These few letters from Lord Altamont again and again urged Thomas to make more translations of the Odes of Horace. But none were forthcoming. (*Memls.*, I, 42 ff.)

fore the middle of September, and stayed on for most of the time until he entered Manchester Grammar School on 9 November 1800.<sup>18</sup>

## II

LADY CARBERY was the daughter of a Colonel Watson of the Indian service. As a girl in the middle 'teens she had been taken to England and left there by her father in the care of a Mrs. Schreiber, a rich widow and an old friend of Mrs. Quincey; indeed, Colonel Watson himself seems to have been a friend of the Quinceys before he went to India. Lady Carbery was ten years older than Thomas; in 1800 she was about twenty-five. 'She had known me from infancy,' he wrote, and had frequently visited Mrs. Quincey both at The Farm and at Greenhay.<sup>19</sup> 'Every year our intimacy had been renewed, until her marriage interrupted it. But, after no very long interval, when my mother had transferred her household to Bath, in that city we frequently met again.' 'To myself,' he went on, 'she had always been indulgently kind; I was protected in her regard, beyond anybody's power to dislodge me, by her childish remembrances; and of late years [that is, about 1800] she had begun to entertain the highest opinion of my intellectual promises.'<sup>20</sup>

Lady Carbery was obviously a woman of ability, dignity, and considerable intellectual power. 'Her understanding was justly reputed a fine one; but, in general, it was calculated to win respect rather than love, for it was masculine and austere, with very little toleration for sentiment and romance' — a trait which showed itself in her 'constitutional ineptitude for poetry.'<sup>21</sup> Lord Carbery was an Eton man, somewhat of a student, but a thorough fox-hunter. In short, he was a regular country gentleman of a high order. And De Quincey added, 'His wife never ceased to esteem and admire him.' But in spite of this phrase, one surmises that she was

<sup>18</sup> *Chetham Society, Adm. Reg.*, II, 224.

<sup>19</sup> 'Miss Watson must have succeeded at once to six thousand a year on completing her twenty-first year; and she also inherited a Chancery suit.' De Quincey's *Posthumous Works*, ed. Japp (1891), I, 313.

<sup>20</sup> *Works*, I, 329.

<sup>21</sup> *Works*, I, 394.



not too happily married <sup>22</sup> — and the surmise has certain evidence to support it.

It was to the Carbery estate at Laxton, then, that Thomas went after he left Lord Westport at Birmingham on that September day in 1800. Lord Carbery was absent at the moment in Ireland; but with his wife De Quincey found not only his own sister, but Lord and Lady Massey, a young couple recently married. Lady Massey was an intimate friend of Lady Carbery; Lord Massey was the only man of the party and somewhat lonely in that capacity, so that the hostess greeted the boy with special satisfaction as a male companion to her guest, who should help while away long evenings with conversation.

'For a service of that nature, could she reasonably rely upon me?' De Quincey asks, and his answer is in the affirmative. 'Though naturally the shyest of human beings, intense commerce with men 'of every rank, from the highest to the lowest, had availed to dissipate all arrears of *mauvaise honte*; I could talk upon innumerable subjects; and as the readiest means of entering immediately upon business, I was fresh from Ireland — knew multitudes of those whom Lord Massey either knew or felt an interest in — and, at that happy period of life, found it easy, with three or four glasses of wine, to call back the golden spirits which were now so often deserting me.' <sup>23</sup>

There was no lack of subjects. There were the stables of Westport and Laxton — those at Westport like the 'establishment of some Albanian pacha,' those at Laxton, 'magnificent'; the experiences of riding upon the 'restive, hard-mouthed wretches which Lord Westport and I daily had to bestride and which no tongue could describe'; and the memories of driving over rough Irish roads. 'I won him easily to an interest in my own Irish experiences, so fresh, and in parts so grotesque, wilder also by much in Connaught than in Lord Massey's county of Limerick.' Then Thomas drew him out upon English hunting. 'But my quick instinct soon

<sup>22</sup> *Works*, I, 366.

<sup>23</sup> *Works*, I, 334 ff. Can this last sentence imply merely that he was unhappy over the uncertainty of his future at school? Or is he beginning to hate the thought of any school whatever because of his feeling of maturity?

made me aware that a jealousy was gathering in Lord Massey's mind around such a topic, as though too ostentatiously levelled to his particular knowledge, or to his *animal* condition of taste. But easily I slipped off into another key. At Laxton it happened the library was excellent. . . . Lord Massey was far from illiterate. . . . More and more from this quarter it was that we drew the materials of our early after-dinner conversation.' <sup>24</sup>

He also had opportunities of meeting the gentry of the neighbourhood. Lady Carbery, partly to entertain her guests, dined with her neighbours two or three times a week. 'I was invariably the attendant of the two ladies' — Lady Carbery and Lady Massey — ; 'and thus, under Lady Carbery's protection, I came to see the English aristocracy, the Great Houses of Belvoir (pronounced *Beevor*), Burleigh etc., and the crowds of subordinate families, with their winter visitors, more extensively than ever I had seen the aristocracy of Ireland; and this with a freedom of intercourse which would not have been conceded to me at a more advanced age.' <sup>25</sup> Lord Massey rarely went with the ladies. 'He recoiled from what he figured to himself, . . . as the haughty and disdainful English nobility. . . . "I," said Lord Massey, "had a careless Irish education, and am never quite sure that I may not be trespassing on some mysterious law of English breeding." ' <sup>26</sup> Thomas, however, had no such fears; and he returned from these parties to report 'in terms of unexceptionable decorum, those flattering expressions of homage' to Lady Massey which he had heard uttered 'from the lips of young men partially under the influence of wine.' Social tact could go no further.

In other ways, De Quincey was a means of comfort and interest to Lady Carbery herself. She had an active mind; her marriage had not completely satisfied her; and the result was 'a premature disgust with the world,' driving her to a serious concern with religion of the severer sort. 'Had any mode of monastic life existed for Protestants, I believe that she would

<sup>24</sup> *Works*, I, 340.

<sup>25</sup> *Life and Manners*, p. 166 (the original form of the essay *Premature Manhood*, reprinted from Tait, 1834), Boston, 1851.

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, I, 347.

before this have entered it,' is De Quincey's comment. She was strongly influenced by Mrs. Quincey and her circle. 'She recoiled, by natural temperament and by refinement of taste, from all modes of religious enthusiasm'; and being essentially intellectual, she turned to the study of divinity; 'and,' writes De Quincey, 'she relied upon me for assisting her.' He knew no theology, and she was aware of it; but he had knowledge of Greek, he had read philosophy and history, and he had a mind. The resulting studies were confined to reading the Greek Testament and to those questions which sprang out of it.

Two questions are preserved for us in the autobiographic sketch. First, what did John the Baptist mean in preaching 'repentance'; secondly, what was the difference between the Christian religion and the religion of Judaism, Mahometanism, and Paganism? The answer to the first was that 'repentance' is a poor translation of the original which really means to 'contemplate moral truth as radiating from a new centre; apprehend it under transfigured relations. . . . Geocentric has that [moral] system been up to this hour — that is, having earth and the earthly for its starting point; henceforward make it *heliocentric* (that is, with the sun, or the heavenly, for its principal motion).' The answer to the second is that 'To Christians, [religion] means, over and above mode of worship, a dogmatic (that is, a doctrinal) system; a great body of doctrinal truths, moral and spiritual. But to the ancients (to the Greeks and Romans, for instance) it meant nothing of the kind,' but simply a mode of ritual worship.<sup>27</sup>

It is not the ultimate truth of these answers which concerns us here; merely the fact that Thomas De Quincey, at sixteen, and Lady Carbery, eager if unlearned, were striking deep into things; and that 'the incessant demands made upon [him] by Lady Carbery for solutions of the many difficulties besetting the study of divinity and the Greek Testament, or for such approximations to solutions as [his] resources would furnish, forced [him] into a preternatural tension of all the faculties applicable to that purpose.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Works*, I, 368 ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, I, 378.

Lady Carbery learned Greek enough to read the Greek Testament; then Thomas, concerned less with religion than with ancient culture, tried to induce her to go on to Herodotus. But the plan fell through, partly, no doubt, from her lack of eagerness, and partly because Thomas intended to supply the lack of a Greek lexicon by constructing one himself! Yet Lady Carbery was an enthusiastic and serious student, and continued her biblical studies. During the following winter but one, when she and her household were spending some months in Manchester, she undertook to learn Hebrew and offered to hand on her knowledge to Thomas. But he was not greatly interested; and 'in a pause of languor amongst these arid Hebrew studies, [he] read to her with a beating heart the "Ancient Mariner."' But she laughed at the finest parts, and shocked him by calling the Mariner himself 'an old quiz.'<sup>29</sup> There was, however, enough sympathy between them to keep their friendship fresh, and in that autumn of 1800, aroused by his recent meeting with Miss Blake, he found her youth and beauty directly appealing to his admiration of her as a woman, and 'had she not been known to me from my childhood,' he admits, she would have exerted a still stronger charm.<sup>30</sup>

There was one other side to his stay at Laxton which must be noticed. 'Lady C[arbery] was anxious that I should become a sort of Alcibiades, or Aristippus, of ambidexterous powers, and capable of shining equally in little things and in great. Accordingly, whilst I taught *her* Greek . . . she took measures for *my* instruction in such accomplishments as were usually possessed by the men of her circle. In particular, she was anxious that I should become a good shot; and, for this purpose, put me under the care of one of her husband's game-keepers. Duly, for many weeks, I accompanied the zealous keeper into the L-xt-n woods, and did my best to improve. But my progress was slow indeed; and at last my eyes opened clearly to the fact, that my destiny was not in that direction which could command the ordinary sympathies of this world or of woman, even though accomplished woman, moving under common and popular impulses.' He persevered during

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, I, 394 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Life and Manners*, p. 164.

his stay at Laxton; but his hunting and shooting ended there and then.<sup>81</sup>

Thus during the summer at Dublin and Westport and during the autumn at Laxton, De Quincey was moving in new social circles, was living in new environments with freedom from parental restraints, in situations where he found himself the intellectual equal of, or even superior to, men and women above him in age and rank. He consciously saw himself developing with startling rapidity. To quote his own words: — ‘ In what regarded my intellectual expansion, never before or since had I been so distinctly made aware of it. No longer did it seem to move upon the hour-hand, whose advance, though certain, is yet a pure matter of inference, but upon the seconds-hand, which *visibly* comes on at a trotting pace. Everything prospered, except my own present happiness, and the possibility of any happiness for some years to come.’<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Life and Manners*, p. 164.

<sup>82</sup> *Works*, I, 380.

## CHAPTER IV

### MANCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL

1800-1802

#### I

**B**EFORE he left Laxton, his mother and guardians had finally determined that De Quincey should proceed to the Manchester Grammar School. He was registered on 9 November 1800 — 'Thomas, son of the late Thomas De Quincey, Merchant, Bath.'<sup>1</sup> He had convinced his mother that Eton was not to be considered; but he was disappointed not to return to Bath, even though he had no special prejudice against the Manchester Grammar School itself.

The Manchester Grammar School had age and standing. Founded, like so many others, in the sixteenth century, it had had a noble history and offered real local advantages. It was in the neighbourhood of a *good* library, and was almost contiguous to a magnificent collegiate church. But the real reason for selection, apart from the reputation of excellence, was the fact that the school had a number of exhibitions at Brasenose College, Oxford, open to students who should study at the school for three consecutive years — exhibitions of forty guineas a year for a period of four years. Since Thomas's income from his father's estate was £150 a year at most, the added forty guineas would raise his funds nearly to the £200 considered as the proper figure for an Oxford student.<sup>2</sup> Add to this probable financial advantage, the fact that Thomas would be in Manchester in the immediate neighbourhood of his most active guardian, Mr. Hall, and that his mother had friends still living in the city, and one can see how satisfied the guardians might well feel at the solu-

<sup>1</sup> His statement in the 'Autobiography' (*Works*, I, 380) is inaccurate. 'About two months after leaving Laxton, my fate . . . was solemnly and definitely settled.' He had reached Laxton about September 15; he was entered at the Manchester Grammar School on November 9 (*Chetham Soc. Admissions Register* (1776-1807), II, 224).

<sup>2</sup> De Quincey is in error in saying that the exhibitions were granted for a period of seven years. *Ibid*, loc. cit.; *Works*, III, 247.

tion of Thomas's educational problem. But there was another factor, namely, Thomas himself; and him no one concerned seemed seriously to consider, or to try to understand.

His early impressions of Mr. Lawson, the Archididascalus, were unfavourable. There was little natural sympathy between master and pupil, and his later experiences at the school only strengthened the antipathy and made De Quincey feel that Mr. Lawson was one of the major causes for his unhappiness there. Mr. Lawson was an old man of about seventy-five, sick and disillusioned; he had been a disappointed Jacobite and a disappointed lover. He lived alone and ruled the school with an excess of conscientiousness. He lived, moreover, in the past; keeping unused hunters, reading only the classics, and trying to preserve in his establishment the forms of an Oxford hall. Yet we gather that he was alive to modern movements in education, to the extent at least of abolishing corporal punishment; and he seems to have been fortunate or skilful in maintaining among the older students an atmosphere of free intellectual interest and inquiry, and to have encouraged a high order of self discipline on the part of the upper school. But he rubbed his brilliant pupil the wrong way by his lack of profound scholarship, or, perhaps, by the lack of stimulus in his teaching, and by his excessive regulation of the times and periods of the school day.<sup>8</sup>

First came the test of Thomas's knowledge — his entrance examination. Mr. Lawson 'produced from his desk a volume of the *Spectator*, and instructed me to throw into as good Latin as I could some paper of Steele's — not the whole, but perhaps a third part. No better exercise could have been devised for testing the extent of my skill as a Latinist. . . . I succeeded and beyond my expectation.' Although, as Thomas explains, neither in Greek nor in Latin was his *knowledge* very extensive, his age made that impossible, yet he had great ability in reviewing the relations of one idea to

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, III, 273. His description of Mr. Lawson in the first version of the *Confessions* was characterized as 'unjust to his character and attainments' by the Chetham Society. In the final version, De Quincey softened it so that the picture is, if not sympathetic, not without understanding and reasonable justice.

another, so as to present modern and unclassical subjects under such aspects as might suggest periphrases in substitution for direct names, where names could not be had, and everywhere colour his translation with as rich a display of idiomatic forms as the circumstances of the case would allow. 'For once . . . Mr. Lawson did absolutely pay me a compliment.' The fact that Mr. Lawson seldom paid compliments was, no doubt, one of the reasons for De Quincey's feeling against him. 'And with another compliment more than verbal he crowned his gracious condescensions — viz. with my provisional instalment in the highest class.' <sup>4</sup>

On the Sunday following, Thomas transferred himself to Mr. Lawson's house, where he met for the first time the group of the upper school. The older boys lived under Mr. Lawson's roof, and as Thomas soon discovered, they 'were bound together by links of brotherhood — a club of boys (among whom might be four or five that were even young men, counting eighteen or nineteen years) altogether as thoughtful and as self-respecting as can often exist among adults.' On that particular night he was dejected, even to the point of showing his feelings, when a boy produced some brandy — the first that Thomas had ever tasted; and to his surprise his spirits at once changed and he was reinstalled in his natural advantages of conversation. Then followed a discussion upon Grotius's *De Veritate Christianae Religionis*, in contrast with Lardner and Paley — a discussion sustained not only by Thomas himself, but with brilliant dialectic and paradox by others of the company; yet, as he points out, some of the boys came from the families of artisans, whose sisters were actually menials, and none came from families higher than those of rural gentry or clergymen. Among these same boys, also, he found a comprehensive knowledge of English literature such as he rarely found afterwards, even among professional *littérateurs*.

His school-fellows were not, however, his only compensations in his school-life at Manchester. He had a private room allowed him in which he not only studied but slept at night, an item of luxury which tended to encourage a growing aloofness from his mates; for, as he writes, 'whilst liking the society



of some amongst them, I also had a deadly liking (perhaps a morbid liking) for solitude.' Again, his mother sent him five guineas *extra* for the purchase of an admission to the Manchester library. And a third luxury was added, namely, a pianoforte together with the money for regular lessons. He loved music, as we know: and the piano was presumably in response to his own request, a sort of *douceur* on the part of his mother for the decree which sent him to Manchester. But regular practice on the instrument was impossible for him. 'Too soon I became aware that to the deep voluptuous enjoyment of music absolute *passiveness* in the hearer is indispensable,' he writes; and his music teacher finding that Thomas was making no serious effort to improve, shook hands with him one fine day and took his leave for ever.<sup>5</sup>

## II

THOMAS seems during his entire stay at the Grammar School to have had no intimate friends among the boys of his own age. Yet, in spite of the rigidity of the school régime, he was not entirely cut off from outside society. He had old friends of his family at hand. He saw something of the Kelsalls; but by this time he found little intellectual sympathy with them. Mr. Kelsall was strictly mercantile in outlook and interests, and Thomas had come to hate with mighty hatred the materialism of Manchester and all it stood for. Then there was Mr. Hall; but, again, between him and Thomas there had grown up a feeling close to hostility, which was to increase sharply within the next few years. Of really comforting friends during his eighteen months at the Grammar School, there were but two who stand out pre-eminent: one, the Reverend John Clowes; the other, Lady Carbery, who spent the winter of 1801-2 in Manchester to be near her old friend and guardian, Mrs. Schreiber, who was seeking in desperate illness the aid of Manchester physicians.

We know most about his intercourse with Mr. Clowes; in two places De Quincey tells of their mutual friendship, 'as close as can ever have existed between a boy and a man already grey-headed.' The connexion was, as it were, inherited.

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, III, 270.

Mr. Clowes was a man under sixty at the time<sup>6</sup> and of some distinction; a clergyman of the Church of England with an ardent admiration for Swedenborg, to whose service through translation and exposition he had devoted many years of a beautiful and quiet life. The friendship of the older man for the lad was based, De Quincey tells us, 'upon his notice of my fervent simplicity, and my unusual thoughtfulness.' 'The common ground on which we met was literature — more especially the Greek and Roman literature;' and much he exerted himself, in a spirit of the purest courtesy, to meet my animation upon these themes. . . . He spoke much from memory, as it were of things he had once felt, and little from immediate sympathy with the author; and his animation was artificial, though his courtesy, which prompted the effort, was the truest and most unaffected possible. . . . As a bond of connexion there was nothing at all that I know of beyond the common tendency to reverie which is a bad link for *social* connexion.'<sup>7</sup> Literature, however, was not the only subject of intercourse between them; for in the dignified house with its old Italian pictures and its stained glass windows — 'really storied windows' — was a 'sweet toned organ, ancient and elaborately carved in the wood-work, at which my venerable friend readily sat down, and performed the music of anthems as often as I asked him, sometimes accompanying it with his voice,' — as he did on De Quincey's visit in the first part of July 1802, just before his final departure from the Grammar School, the last time they were ever to meet.

Greater cheer De Quincey found in Lady Carbery. 'Precisely at the worst crisis of this intolerable darkness' — of bodily and mental distress in the late autumn of 1801 — 'arose, and for five or six months steadily continued, a consolation of that nature which hardly in dreams I could have anticipated' — the transference of the society of Laxton to Manchester. And it brought a 'prodigious revolution for the better which was now impressed upon the tenor of my daily life. I lived in the house of the head-master; but every night I had leave to adjourn for four or five hours, to the

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, I, 138. Yet De Quincey paints him as in extreme old age giving away volumes of Homer and Virgil as if taking farewell of worldly literature.

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, II, 119.

drawing-room of Lady Carbery. . . . And I . . . was too happy in her conversation — so bold, so novel, and so earnest — voluntarily to have missed any one hour of it.' At this time it was that she tried to teach him Hebrew.<sup>8</sup>

At Christmas time, 1801, was the usual celebration of the season by public speeches at the school. Thomas was one of six speakers, reciting a copy of Latin Alcaics on the subject *Dolor ipse desertum fecerat*.<sup>9</sup> To support him, the entire Laxton grōup attended, Lady Carbery bringing in her train every person whom she could influence. 'Furious, at any rate, was the applause which greeted me,' he writes; 'furious was my own disgust. Frantic were the clamours as I concluded my nonsense: frantic was my inner shame at the childish exhibition to which, unavoidably, I was making myself a party.' The occasion sums up dramatically all that he tells us of his attitude of mind. 'At night, [Lady Carbery] assured me, when talking over the case, that she had never witnessed an expression of such settled misery, and also (so she fancied) of misanthropy, as that which darkened my countenance in those moments of apparent public triumph . . . and amidst an uproar of friendly felicitation.'<sup>10</sup> A few months later, Lady Carbery and her party left Manchester; and De Quincey never saw her again.

### III

I MUST now turn to the summer vacation of 1801. On 20 May Mrs. Quincey wrote Thomas a letter from Everton, near Liverpool — a 'steering chart,' as she called it — for guiding him and his two brothers Pink and Henry who were to join him for the journey from Manchester to Liverpool.<sup>11</sup> It was full of minute directions, as to how the boys were to take the canal-boat on Saturday morning, if it ran on that day, to Warrington London Bridge; as to how they were to dine in Warrington, and were then to take the long coach to Liver-

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, I, 383 ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Chetham Soc. Admission Register*, II, 225. De Quincey is in error when he says that his subject was *Melite Britannis Subacta*. Perhaps he was remembering the theme of some other exercise.

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, I, 396.

<sup>11</sup> They were at school at Horwich Moor, Lancashire, where Thomas visited them in the winter of 1801. *Works*, I, 291.

pool which stopped at the Angel Inn, Dale Street. If the servant did not meet them, they were to take a coach to Everton. 'I beg your principal care,' she wrote, 'may be given to Henry, who is so blind he cannot see a horse till it is close to his elbow, and so frightened when he does see it, that he loses the power of moving. . . I must repeat, do not let Henry go from you for a moment, and let Pink mind the luggage. Keep Henry from leaning against the coach door or over the edge of the boat.' <sup>12</sup> Such care was the natural expression of Mrs. Quincey's anxiety for her sons; but evidently, also, it was the expression of her belief that Thomas very much needed direction; that he was, in fact, a mere boy and a not very responsible boy at that, who, though an elder brother, was not greatly to be trusted in practical affairs.

This same letter tells us also of some of the advantages of Everton. 'You need bring no books, for Mr. Clarke, our neighbour' — Mrs. Best's where the family was to lodge was opposite Mr. Clarke's, the banker's — 'will lend you any Greek or Latin author. Of Italian, French, and English books he seems to have store also; and in the town there is really a noble library, to which Mr. Cragg will introduce you.' In naming Mr. Clarke, she named the man who was to give Thomas a glimpse of the literary coterie of Liverpool about which he later wrote a none too flattering account, but which after all, was the first literary group of any eminence with which he was to associate. To Mr. Clarke's villa, Thomas as the eldest son — his brothers were twelve and nine respectively — received a general invitation. 'Thither I went,' he tells us, 'early and late; and there I met Mr. Roscoe, Dr. Currie (who had just at that time published his *Life and Edition of Burns*), and Mr. Shepherd of Gatacre, the author of some works on Italian literature (particularly a *Life of Poggio Bracciolini*) and, since then, well known to all England by his Reform politics. . . . Mr. Clarke was not an author, and he was by much the most interesting person of the whole. He had travelled, and, particularly, he had travelled in Italy — then an aristocratic distinction; had a small, but interesting, picture-gallery; and, at this time, amused himself

<sup>12</sup> *Mems.*, I, 60 ff.

by studying Greek, for which purpose he and myself met at sunrise every morning through the summer, and read Aeschylus 'together.' These meetings were pleasant enough to Thomas's school-boy vanity, placing him in the position of teacher and guide to a much older person, a position in which he had been, with variations, rather often of late.<sup>13</sup>

But the literary gatherings he found dull, 'with the *fade* generalities and barren recollections of mere literati.' Mr. Roscoe was 'simple and manly in his demeanour; but there was the feebleness of a mere *belle-lettrist*, a mere man of *virtù*, in the style of his sentiments on most subjects.' Mr. Shepherd was a buffoon, talking often wildly, if an upright man. As for Dr. Currie, Thomas disagreed with his interpretation of Burns in his recent life of the poet; he says, 'I talked, then, being a school-boy, with and against the first editor of Burns.' Thomas's final verdict on the group is summed up in the following passage: — 'Nothing can better serve to expound the general force of intellect amongst the Liverpool coterie than the quality of their poetry. . . . To me, who in that year, 1801, already knew of a grand renovation of poetic power — of a new birth in poetry, interesting not so much to England as to the human mind — it was secretly amusing to contrast the little superficial usages of their petty traditional knack with the natural forms of a divine art.'<sup>14</sup>

At Everton De Quincey spent most of that summer; but before 29 August 1801, he was back again at school, only to sink into a growing wretchedness which reached its climax in the following July.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV

THE first concrete sign of Thomas's discontent, apart from the general objection he had had to going to school at all, is a shocked letter from Mrs. Quincey dated 18 February 1802, and written from the Priory, Chester, a house she had purchased during the preceding October. She had recently

<sup>13</sup> *Works*, II, 125 ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, II, 129. De Quincey was already a worshipper of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

<sup>15</sup> BS. MSS.; also *Mems.*, I, 64, where the address to the letter is not given.

**PLATE IV. THOMAS DE QUINCEY**  
**1802**

**From a miniature in the possession of Miss Bairdsmith**



visited her son in Manchester; and in a parting interview Thomas had broken forth into passionate speech declaring that he *must* leave the Grammar School at once. Mrs. Quincey had waited in vain for a letter of further explanation as to his state of mind; and now at last she wrote to inquire a little further into the situation which, certainly, at the time filled her with amazement and anguish. Perhaps, she went on, 'your full design, had I known it, might have lessened some of the pain which your communication, so suddenly and partially made, sent me suffering away with.' Evidently the maternal eye had hitherto detected no signs of worry. And she continued to expostulate with him, and to assure him that he could not go to the university until he was eighteen, and that his proposal to leave school and stay at home until he could be entered at Oxford would mean nearly two years of idling. His revolt was nothing short of disobedience to his father's last and most solemn act which appointed Thomas to submit to the directions of his guardians, to Mr. Hall and herself, in particular, in what regarded his education.

She discussed with vigour his claim to possible innate greatness and to noble ancestry. 'I cannot think,' she continued, 'you believe a total revolt from our rule will make you in any sense great if you have not the constituents of greatness in you, or that waiting the common course of time and expediency will at all hinder the maturity of your powers, if you have them.' Then with even more sting, 'My dear son, let me conjure you (though I might justly use a different tone) to ask yourself whether it is any part or any mark of greatness to feel solicitous to be thought what you are not. It is common enough for mean and little minds to court the opinion of fools by false pretences; but if you ever arrive at higher distinction, your birth and your fortune can have no share in your elevation; you have nothing to boast of or to blush for in either; but were you to stir up doubtful and remote pretensions to a line of ancestry, you would become truly ridiculous; Milton's genius could not save you from positive contempt. This folly I hope you will not cherish.' <sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> BS. MSS.; partly in *Mems.*, I, 70 ff.



Thomas still remained silent; and again Mrs. Quincey wrote on 4 March, a letter less shocked but full of high moral appeal. She had 'an awful account to give as a parent; if any one temper of mind may singly be put to denote the whole anti-Christian character, it is self-glory; and its monstrous adjuncts are independence and pride.' Then she added, 'I plainly perceive that you have one, and that the most dangerous faculty of the mind, the imagination, above all the rest; but it will desolate your life and hopes, if it be not restrained and brought under religious government. . . . You are now carried away wholly, blinded by the bewildering light of your fancy, and that you may never see clearer, your reading is all of a sort to weaken your mental optics.'

At last Thomas wrote to her; but he apparently gave her no satisfaction. The letter is lost, but the gist is clear from her reply of April 12. His letter ignored all her arguments. 'I see no use in repeating the same things, or all the new ones in the world, if you only say the old one, that you are miserable. . . . You have urged your misery, and you still urge it again; but cannot you tell me what it is. Surely misery that is real must have a name, and I solemnly pledge myself to remedy any *real* grievance you endure as far as I can; but to attempt to cure the evils I do not know, to accede to reasons without hearing them, and to comply with *unsettled* schemes are things neither reasonable nor practicable.' Perhaps he would prefer explaining himself to some third party. In any case she *must* consult Mr. Hall. She saw nothing to console her; he let nothing fasten on his mind but the desire to leave school. Was there something which was yet unrevealed?<sup>17</sup>

Then Thomas wrote a full letter, preserved only in part and undated, drawn up like a legal brief, with its heads and subheads and an orderliness as of troops marching. It began with a long series of refutations, full of intensity in his desire to escape from the situation in which he found himself; and throughout he felt passionately that if he could only destroy his mother's objections one by one, she *must* admit his reasonableness and accede to his demands.

It is unnecessary to follow all the details, but so many are

revealing of his mind and situation that I must quote largely. One of his mother's arguments was that school tended to make him more diligent than any year of freedom could. School 'has no tendency to make me *notible* [sic],' he wrote. 'The truth is, that no situation could give me more opportunity of being idle, nor more desirous of using that opportunity.' Here was his old claim of the need of stimulus for exertion. 'The third and last negative advantage attached to my remaining at school — "that it will keep me from unrestrained liberty" — I suspect to have more weight with you than all the rest put together; and yet perhaps it is the one which, of all the others, is the most palpably specious. At Mr. Lawson's, it is true, there is a form of restraint kept up, and *only* a form; for the restraint itself is what any person may elude. I could prove this to you from many instances of the most unbridled licentiousness which have fallen under my observation. At present I have no time for any of these instances; but I will observe in general that *here* I have no motive for resisting the temptation to enjoy that unrestrained liberty which is continually offered me; at *home*, whilst I retained any shame, I should have at least one motive for curbing my passions.' But even if the negative arguments stood, he would still be miserable. And he turned finally to his positive case.

'I ask whether a person can be happy, or even simply *easy*, who is in a situation which deprives him of *health*, of *society*, of *amusement*, of *liberty*, of *congeniality of pursuits*, and which to complete the precious picture, admits of no *variety*. I think you will hardly say he can; and yet this description was taken from my own case.

'As to *health*, I may say very fairly that I have not passed one quarter of the time I have been at this school in health. I have not, it is true, been seriously ill; but I have been — what to me is worse — weary, and torpid, and languid; and no wonder, for there are three things at Mr. Lawson's which murder health. The first is want of exercise, which the whole purpose of the school seems purposely directed to deny one; in winter there is, for a considerable length of time, not *one* hour of the day for walking out. The second is the badness of the air, which every day grows worse and worse from the increasing numbers of these diabolical factories. The third is the short time one has to eat one's dinner in; I have barely time to push

it down, and as to chewing it, that is out of the question. This last circumstance is, on me at least, less gradual in its effects than the two former, though they are all three (I should think) enough to ruin any person's health. This loss of health, however, though *principally*, is not *wholly*, produced by external circumstances; for, as loss of health leaves the mind but ill at ease, so the misery of the mind, by alternate reaction, affects the health of the body; they are mutually cause and effect.'

He then lamented the lack of society.

'Do not think that by society,' he went on, 'I mean a whole host of intimates and acquaintances. I should dislike such society almost as much as my present loneliness. Naturally, I am fond of solitude; but everyone has times when he wishes for company; at these times I know but one place where I can turn to for it; and there it is not always to be found. *Amusements*, it is evident, without a sharer in them, I can have none; and yet, who does not require some relaxation?

'You will be surprised, after what I have said in answer to your third negative argument, that I put the want of *liberty* among the grounds of my misery; but there is nothing inconsistent in this, for, in the first place, I was not speaking of freedom with respect to things on which — if on any — school-discipline should lay restraint — here I am speaking of that liberty which ought to be allowed at schools as much as any other place — the liberty of taking walks; and this liberty is by no means to be enjoyed here; for even at those hours when the school does not interfere with it, our time is so unaccountably and so unnecessarily parcelled out into shreds and scraps by meals and *callings-over*, that at every turn of the day there is something lying in wait to prevent one from taking continued exercise.

'The fifth cause of my misery contains in itself a world of argument. To give you some idea of my meaning, I must beg you to consider that I am living in a town where the sole and universal object of pursuit is precisely that which I hold most in abhorrence. In this place trade is the religion, and money is the god. Every object I see reminds me of those occupations which run counter to the bent of my nature, every sentiment I hear sounds a discord to my own. I cannot stir out of doors but I am nosed by a factory, a cotton-bag, a cotton-dealer, or something else allied to that most detestable commerce. Such an object dissipates the whole train of romantic visions I had conjured up, and frequently gives the colouring to all my associations of ideas during the remainder of the day.

'These five evils are, in themselves, sufficiently great; but my

sixth cause of complaint — that they admit of no variety — serves to aggravate them all. Every day, and every day, with scarcely a moment's variation, returns the same dull routine of stupid employments. If even a happy situation, when chequered by no "sweet interchange of light and shade," becomes tiresome and disgusting, — what must that situation be which, in itself miserable, superadds this also to complete its misery, that it experiences no change, that it is *uniformity* of misery. Perpetual light is bad; but far worse is that situation where no ray ever enters,

"But cloud instead and ever during dark."

All these arguments are enough to prove that I have reason to be miserable.' <sup>18</sup>

In the final form of the *Confessions* he elucidates the state of his health by specific details. Gradually the liver became affected; and connected with that affection arose, what often accompanies such ailments, profound melancholy. The trouble was lack of exercise, as he had said in his letter; but the boy did not know the remedy. He consulted a physician — who gave him a horrid mixture. In ordinary circumstances and with plenty of exercise, no creature could be healthier than he. But his organization was perilously frail; and instead of three doses of blue pills, his medical advisor administered two 'tiger-drenches' which in addition to the effects of his sedentariness brought him to absolute despair.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas was certainly in a state of mind. Perhaps he had been spoiled by his summer of 1800 with its high associations and his feeling of superiority to the older and more aristocratic persons among whom he had moved. He was, as he felt himself to be, too old mentally to attend a Grammar School, even though he found there an exceptional group of boys for fellows. The dull life of school and the idleness which his advanced learning made possible, only gave him opportunity for meditative discontent. He needed competition to stir him to exertion; and boy-like he was not self-propelling. Unhappiness settled upon him; the regular routine of school intensified it. As a result, or as a cause, bad health aggravated it. He found no friends of his own

<sup>18</sup> BS. MSS.; *Memls.*, I, 79 ff.; Page, I, 74 ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Works*, III, 275.

age; and he characteristically shunned his schoolmates in whom he might have discovered the companionship which he craved. He loved solitariness, he tells us; yet he lacked the maturity to be content with loneliness. He felt superior to his fellows, to his family friends — with the exception of Dr. Clowes and Lady Carbery — and all they cared for. The commercial life of Manchester was anathema to him. He was a misfit; but where would he have been happier? He was in a state of rebellion, and his mother and guardians were naturally enough prepared to maintain the *status quo*. In this situation, De Quincey flashes forth with startling vividness of self-revelation. One can only sympathize with those who were decreed by fate to guide him; but one can, not less, sympathize with him and even admire his power of will and suffering.

## V

IN spite of the impression of a continuous and increasing misery of school life from the late winter into the summer of 1802 which we get from the letters and even more from the *Confessions*, the spring brought its vacation from Manchester. For some two months, from about the first of May to late June, he returned to stay with Mrs. Best at Everton. He was sent there rather than allowed to go home because of his rebelliousness. His mother in a letter of June 2<sup>20</sup> spoke of her unwillingness to have him living with her in his then state of mind — of 'the unhappiness, to me at least, from your living with me . . . because we have very few sentiments of union between us; and the whole task of suppressing opposing ones would fall on me.' She was frightened at his insistence upon 'early emancipation and other preposterous theories'; and she would not have him come home to corrupt his brothers. 'I will, to the best of my power, keep them from the mischief and misery of hearing your present senti-

<sup>20</sup> On June 6 Mrs. Quincey addressed a letter to him in care of Mr. Cragg, merchant of Liverpool, a family friend with whom Thomas daily dined during his stay. In this letter she enclosed £7 which 'you will pay to Mrs. Best £6. 13s. 10d. out of.' (*Mems.*, I, 87.) From the diary of 1803 we know that Mrs. Best charged about £1. 2s. a week for room, breakfast, and candles; so that the sum named as owing Mrs. Best was for six weeks.

ments. . . . It is sufficiently terrible to those affected by such opinions — that is, you and me — without two more poor children being tormented themselves or tormenting me with demanding unnatural liberty.'

The controversy as to his remaining at, or leaving, Manchester still went on by correspondence. On June 6, however, Mrs. Quincey in a more yielding state of mind, and, perhaps in a spirit of desperation, at last agreed to supply, or produce, £100 a year to use as her son should see fit, to enable him to go where he would, if he would only present a reasonable plan. But Thomas did *not* produce a reasonable plan; and even had he done so, the unyielding Mr. Hall's consent would have had to be obtained. So was it that Thomas went back to Manchester. Of his last weeks at the Grammar School we know little from evidence outside the *Confessions*. On July 18, however, Mrs. Quincey wrote to Thomas at the school to say that his uncle, Colonel Penson was in England, having just returned from India. 'When he comes here [to the Priory],' she said, 'I shall write to you, as I would have you come for a week to see so dear a stranger.' This letter he missed, according to the *Confessions*, by his sudden departure, so that when he reached the Priory after the 'elopement,' his uncle's presence there struck him with surprise.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas had lived through only nineteen<sup>22</sup> of the thirty-six months required if he were to obtain an exhibition. His sufferings had become almost insupportable. Then, 'in the twinkling of an eye, I came to an adamantine resolution — not as if issuing from any act or choice of my own, but as if passively received from some dark oracular legislation external to myself. That I would elope from Manchester — this was the resolution. . . . I was, I had been long, captive: I was in a house of bondage: one fulminating word — *Let there be freedom* — spoken from some hidden recess in my own will, had as by an earthquake rent asunder my prison gates. At any minute I could walk out. Already I trod by anticipa-

<sup>21</sup> *Mems.*, I, 88.

<sup>22</sup> If he took up residence on 9 November 1801, by the middle of July he would have been at the school for more than twenty months. But perhaps he did not actually enter until after Christmas.

tion the sweet pastoral hills, already I breathed gales of the everlasting mountains, that to my feelings blew from the garden of Paradise; and in that vestibule of an earthly heaven it was no more possible for me to see vividly or in any lingering detail the thorny cares which might hereafter multiply around me than amongst roses of June, and on the loveliest of June mornings, I could gather depression from the glooms of last December.' <sup>28</sup>

The resolution, however, needed certain material aid for its execution, namely money. He wrote for some to Lady Carbery; a week passed without reply. Then came a letter, belated because Lady Carbery was away from home, enclosing not the £5 he had asked for, but £10. With his own pocket money he now had a dozen guineas. But there were tips to be left for the servants; and he gave £3 to his school-fellow Gilbert to dispense after he had gone. When should he go? Certainly before his birthday on August 15. Then a strange accident put into his hands a letter addressed 'A Monsieur de Quincey, Chester,' forwarded by an error of the post-office. It contained money, and was, apparently, for a poor *émigré*. It must be speeded to its real addressee; and this need, slight as it was, gave the final impulse. Next morning should be the day of departure. The date would seem to have been the seventeenth, eighteenth, or nineteenth of July 1802.

All readers of the *Confessions* must surely remember the passages in which Thomas took farewell of school and master. In spite of suffering there had been many happy hours in the midst of general dejection; and the step he was taking was irreparable. 'Once leave this house, and a Rubicon is placed between thee and all possibility of return. . . . Even now thy conscience speaks against it in sullen whispers; but at the other end of thy life-gallery that same conscience will speak to thee in volleying thunders.' He bade farewell with tears to his chair, hearth, writing-table, and other familiar objects; and as the clock on that summer morning struck six, he kissed the picture of the lovely lady which hung above the mantel, walked out and closed the door for ever. His trunk slipped



**PLATE V. RESIDENCE OF THE HEAD MASTER OF THE  
MANCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

In this house De Quincey lived while at the School; and from it he 'eloped' in July 1802. It stood in Long Millgate and was pulled down in 1835.  
From a contemporary drawing, through the kindness of John Taylor, Esq., of Manchester.





from the shoulders of the groom who was helping him escape, and thundered against the door of Mr. Lawson, but did not wake him. It was placed in a wheelbarrow and trundled off to the carrier's. 'Then "with Providence my guide," or, more truly it might be said, with my headstrong folly for law and impulse, I set off on foot; carrying a small parcel with some articles of dress under my arm, a favourite English poet in one pocket, and an odd volume, containing about one half of Canter's Euripides in the other.' <sup>24</sup>

## VI

His plan originally had been to travel northwards, into Westmorland, which had for him a secret fascination, subtle, sweet, fantastic, and even from his seventh or eighth year, spiritually strong. Part of the district — that which bears the name of Furness — was a section of Lancashire, his own county; and that fact had made him cherish some fraction of denizenship in the fairy little domain of the English Lakes. Furthermore, the whole region, including the ruins of the once glorious abbey of Furness, 'had been brought out not many years before into sunny splendour by the great enchantress of that generation — Anne Radcliffe.' Above all these romantic appeals, however, had 'by that time arisen in this lovely region the deep magnet (as to me *only* in all the world it then was) of William Wordsworth.' <sup>25</sup> The last of these calls of the Lakes was, because of its very strength, the reason — or the determining reason — why he could *not* at the moment listen to it. Where Wordsworth dwelt, was his Mecca, the aim of saintly pilgrimage; but in the present case, under no circumstances could he dream of presenting himself to Wordsworth. 'The principle of "veneration" (to speak phrenologically) was by many degrees too strong in me for any such overture on my part. . . . I could not even tolerate the prospect (as a bare possibility) of Wordsworth's hear-

<sup>24</sup> *Works*, III, 299; he never returned to the school. In his old age, viz. on 18 June 1856, he requested his daughter Emily to send the completed five volumes of his *Works* to the 'Captain' of the school (Page, II, 115); and in 1857, he wrote the Captain a letter of friendly apology for having left unanswered an invitation to attend a commemoration festival (Page, II, 135).

<sup>25</sup> *Works*, III, 283.

ing my name first of all associated with some case of pecuniary embarrassment'; or of 'hurried and thoughtless state of excitement.' There was, also, working against the direction of his steps northward, the consideration for his mother, which made his heart recoil from giving her too great a shock; to avoid that he must go to her.

He turned southwest, therefore, and proceeded through Altrincham, with its early memories of the market-place fourteen years before. Two hours' exercise and his sense of freedom forced his gloom and despondency to the rear; and he proceeded on a pleasant journey, spending one night at an inn on the road, and starting next morning to complete the remaining eighteen miles of the forty from Manchester to Chester, 'inebriated and crazy with ebullient spirits.' He reached Chester under a sunset which brought the lines of Wordsworth's *Ruth* to his mind — a sunset like the Canadian lake

' With all its fairy crowds  
Of islands that together lie  
As quietly as spots of sky  
Amongst the evening clouds.'

'Was I then in July 1802,' he wrote, 'really quoting from Wordsworth? Yes, reader; and I only in all Europe.'<sup>26</sup>

Next morning, he set himself to deliver to the post-office the letter fallen accidentally into his hands; but fearful lest by that act he might become known and possibly be arrested for having possession of what might be considered stolen money, he did not venture to carry it to the office himself. He was also afraid lest he should meet some of his mother's servants in the streets; instead he went out of the city and about the walls. There by the shore of the Dee he saw the great Bore, and met a woman, who for half a crown took the letter off his hands and reported to him later as to its safe delivery.<sup>27</sup>

To be sent back to school was the one thing to be avoided, and yet he had the impulse to get at once into touch with his family — above all with his sister Mary who was eleven months older than himself. 'My business with *her*,' he says,

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, III, 301.

<sup>27</sup> *Works*, III, 305 ff.

'was simply to see her, to learn the domestic news of the Priory, and, according to the possibilities of the case, to concert some plan of regular correspondence.' <sup>28</sup> So at dusk he cautiously approached the house and the ruins in the garden, hoping in some way to attract his sister's attention; but seeing no lights in her room, he found himself observed by some strange servants. He slunk away, returned with a note for Mary, gave it to a groom, and waited. 'In fact, not one minute had I waited, when in glided amongst the ruins — not my fair sister, but my bronzed Bengal Uncle!' <sup>29</sup>

Thomas was discovered. There was nothing to do but to surrender. But the calamity was not so great as he had feared. In his uncle he found an unexpected ally. He wrote: — 'My dear excellent mother, from the eternal quiet of her decorous household, looked upon every violent or irregular movement, and therefore upon mine at present, much as she would have done upon the opening of the seventh seal in the Revelations. But my uncle was thoroughly a man of the world; and, what told even more powerfully on my behalf in this instance, he was a man of even morbid activity. It was so exquisitely natural in his eyes that any rational person should prefer moving about amongst the breezy mountains of Wales to a slavish routine of study amongst books grim with dust and masters too probably still more dusty, that he seemed disposed to regard my conduct as an extraordinary act of virtue.' <sup>30</sup>

There was much family discussion — not too pleasant for the run-away. He was saddened, even though he must have been thoroughly prepared for such reception, by the cold manner of his mother, characteristically turning "the chilling aspects of her high-toned character too exclusively upon those whom, in any degree, she knew or supposed to be promoters of evil. . . . The whole artillery of her displeasure seemed to be unmasked, and *justly* unmasked, against a moral aberration that offered for itself no excuse that was obvious in one moment, that was legible at one glance, that could utter itself

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, III, 310.

<sup>29</sup> Colonel Penson did not apparently go to London as the letter of July 18 from Mrs. Quincey said he was planning to do, but went directly to Chester.

<sup>30</sup> *Works*, III, 312.

in one word. My mother was predisposed to think ill of all causes that required many words: I, predisposed to subtleties of all sorts and degrees. . . . At this moment, sitting in the same room of the Priory with my mother, knowing how reasonable she was — how patient of explanations — how candid — how open to pity — not the less I sank away in a hopelessness that was unmeasurable from all effort of explanation. She and I were contemplating the very same act; but she from one centre, I from another. . . . I felt that the situation was one without hope; a solitary word, which I attempted to mould upon my lips, died away without a sigh; and passively I acquiesced in the apparent confession spread through all the appearances — that in reality I had no palliation to produce.'

However, thanks to Colonel Penson's attitude of practicality, 'it was decided that there could be no hope in any contest with my main wishes, and that I should be left to pursue my original purpose of walking amongst the Welsh mountains;' — what does 'original' mean here? — 'provided I chose to do so upon the slender allowance of a guinea a week.' His uncle would have been glad to have a far larger allowance made him; but 'from general ignorance (in which accomplishment I excelled), I judged this to be sufficient; and at this point, my mother, hitherto passively acquiescent in my uncle's proposals, interfered with decisive rigour that in my heart I could not disapprove. Any larger allowance, most reasonably she urged, what was it but to "make proclamation to my two younger brothers that rebellion bore a premium, and that mutiny was the ready road to ease and comfort." ' <sup>81</sup>

The alternative was offered to him of staying at the Priory. It had once been his own suggestion: a plan which then met his mother's obstinate objections. Now, however, although it was proposed, perhaps by his mother herself, he

<sup>81</sup> In the second version of the *Confessions*, De Quincey congratulates himself that 'the evil consequences from my own example did not take effect.' And he is probably right. The erratic and headstrong character of Richard, needed no brotherly example to run away to sea, and to keep his family on tenterhooks of anxiety for years. The De Quincey family was not, so far as the boys were concerned, created to live quiet and conventional lives.

felt that after his actual outbreak of disobedience he was likely to be pestered at the Priory with fresh and intermitting reproaches; and yet, he admitted, 'I knew my mother sufficiently to be assured that, once having expressed her sorrowful condemnation of my act, having made it impossible for me to misunderstand her views, she was ready to extend her wonted hospitality to me, and (as regarded all practical matters) her wonted kindness; but not that sort of kindness which could make me forget that I stood under the deepest shadows of her displeasure, or could leave me for a moment free to converse at my ease upon any and every subject.' — To stay at home was impossible.

Thomas had won a victory; but it was in part a defeat. He had not been able to convince his mother of his case — of the necessity of his acting as he had done — even of his having felt as he had felt towards the Manchester Grammar School and its régime — even, curiously enough, of his ill-health and his suffering. Furthermore, although he was convinced himself that he had acted from necessity — the necessity of his own mind and body — he knew that he had erred; 'that I knew, and did not disguise from myself. . . . In blind distress of mind, conscience-stricken and heart-stricken, I stretched out my arms' for comfort and help, but in vain. It was in this state that he set out for Wales; but he was free, and glad to have left Manchester and the Priory behind. Change of scene soon brought back buoyancy of health and spirits, so that he could remember the Welsh holiday as on the whole joyous.

CHAPTER V  
WALES AND LONDON

1802-1803

I

THE NARRATIVE of De Quincey's months in Wales and London is too well known from the *Confessions* to be given here in more than brief summary. The record is preserved only in his own eloquent prose.

'The *al fresco* life, to which I had looked forward with so much hopefulness for a sure and rapid restoration to health, was even more potent than I had supposed it. Literally irresistible it seemed in re-organizing the system of my languishing powers.'<sup>1</sup> He pushed on to Carnarvonshire and took for some weeks a miniature suite of rooms at Bangor, where after being suspected through no fault of his own of being one of the numerous 'swindlers' — Irish running away from their debts in England, or English, running away to the Isle of Man — De Quincey moved on to Carnarvon. For some time thereafter he lived at inns. Even in those days of 1802, numerous inns were scattered about the country side, 'and no sort of disgrace was attached in Wales, as too generally upon the great roads of England, to the pedestrian style of travelling. Indeed, the majority of those whom I met as fellow tourists in the quiet little cottage parlours of the Welsh posting-houses were pedestrian travellers. All the way from Shrewsbury through Llangollen, Llanwrst, Conway, Bangor, then turning to the left at right angles through Carnarvon, and so on to Dolgelly (the chief town of Merionethshire) Tan-y-Bwlch, Harlech, Barmouth, and through the sweet solitudes of Cardiganshire, or turning back sharply towards the English border through the gorgeous wood scenery of Montgomeryshire — everywhere, at intermitting distances of twelve or sixteen miles, I found the most comfortable inns.'<sup>2</sup> He seems to have accomplished from seventy

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, III, 320.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, III, 328.

to one hundred miles a week throughout the five northern counties, and to have led the most delightful of lives. But, alas, the cost! About half a guinea a day — and his allowance was a guinea a week — was found necessary for such luxury, and his plans had to be modified. 'My policy therefore was, if the autumnal air were warm enough, to save the expense of a bed and the chambermaid by sleeping amongst ferns or furze upon a hillside; and perhaps, with a cloak of sufficient *weight* as well as compass, or an Arab's burnoose, this would have been no great hardship.' For a time he carried a tent of canvas, manufactured by himself — can one fancy it? — not larger than an ordinary umbrella; but on windy nights it was troublesome; and as winter drew on, after the end of October, such bivouacking became dangerous. Yet through the summer and autumn, he spent on the average nine out of every fourteen nights in the open — his greatest fear, apart from weather, being lest some Welsh cow might in the darkness 'poach' her foot into the centre of his face.<sup>3</sup>

He records with remembered pride his colloquial success at this time in Carnarvonshire inns. Free and buoyant, his high spirits found expression in endless talk to those gathered in inn parlours — talk enriched by his 'prodigious memory' and his 'logical instinct for feeling in a moment the secret analogies or parallelisms that connected things else apparently remote,' by his inexhaustible fertility of topics and a prematurely awakened sense of *art* applied to conversation. And so, he assures us, he became exceedingly popular with the small fluctuating circle of friends.

Among the persons whom he drew thus within his range was a Mr. De Haren, 'an accomplished young German,' who was, or had been, a lieutenant in the British navy; and the intercourse between them was long enough for De Quincey to be able to write in after years that 'From him it was that I obtained my first lessons in German, and my first acquaintance with German literature.'<sup>4</sup> Paul Richter, I then first heard of, together with Hippel, a humourist admired by Kant,

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, III, 330.

<sup>4</sup> In 1835 (*Works*, II, 72), he wrote that when he was at Oxford he had not yet read a line of German. It would seem that he only *heard* of these authors in Wales, or listened to De Haren translate passages.



and Hamann, also classed as a humourist, but a nondescript writer, singularly obscure. . . With all these writers Mr. De Haren had the means of making me usefully acquainted in the small portable library which filled one of his trunks.' <sup>5</sup> Thomas also mentions two lawyers and a clergyman with whom he became well acquainted, one of whom was of material aid to him when he burnt his bridges and departed for London.

But he did not entirely depend upon inns and bare hill-sides; for there were labourers' cottages in which he could hardly spend as much as sixpence a day, where he lived on milk, potatoes, and kid's flesh. At times, such was the hospitality of the cottagers in the remoter sections, he was treated as a guest and was not allowed to pay for food and lodging at all. He tells especially of one household of young people near the lake of Tallylyn, Merionethshire; their parents were on a journey; and for the better part of a week he was entertained as a visitor, and the only return he could make was to write letters for his somewhat illiterate hosts.<sup>6</sup>

Then came the sudden resolution to cut himself off from communication with his family, at the expense of his weekly allowance, and to strike out for perpetual freedom. He could not continue to live in the open as the colder weather approached; he could not live at inns on his allowance; and, further, he would find himself without books and the opportunity of obtaining books, even if he should discover a family with which he might live cheaply and otherwise comfortably. Wales was delightful for a summer vacation; it was bleak exile as a permanent dwelling-place in his circumstances. There seems to have been no *terminus* for his peregrinations in his agreement with his family; he was presumably to keep up his vagrancy as long as he liked, or until he should return home when plans for the future might be arranged. But if he returned home, he might be forced back into school. 'What I dreaded beyond all other evils was the

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, III, 333.

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, III, 336 ff. For an attempt at identifying place and family see *Notes and Queries*, N. S. 12, III (Jan. 13, 1917), 26.

chance of being reclaimed by my guardians; not doubting that whatever power the law gave them would have been enforced against me to the utmost: that is, to the extremity of forcibly restoring me to the school which I had quitted — a humiliation worse to me than death, and which would, indeed, have terminated in death.’ This sentence comes from that part of the story which deals with his hiding in London; but if that fear was so strong upon him two or three months later, it must have followed him in Wales. Thus he was forced to the conclusion that the *only* road to freedom lay through a second elopement.

Such were the reasons for the move to London. And when he got there he planned to borrow from Jewish money-lenders £200 on his personal security based upon the inheritance which would become his at the age of twenty-one. This arrangement would provide him £50 a year. He calculated that he could live in London at a weekly cost of half a guinea a week for a suite of two furnished rooms. This would leave him £25 a year for other expenses. He would then withdraw from the knowledge of his connexions until he should become *sui juris* by course of time.<sup>7</sup> He would thus sacrifice his study at the university; but he had no consuming desire for a university course. The whole success of the scheme depended upon the willingness of the money-lenders.

With this plan in mind and driven by the urge we have seen, some time after November 8<sup>8</sup> he went to Oswestry, spent a few days with a clergyman; and with £12 borrowed from other acquaintances, he set forth for Shrewsbury, took the long coach there, and reached London in due course. At once he applied to a money-lender, and was referred by him to his agent, the ambiguous Mr. Brunell-Brown, in that gloomy house in Soho. And the long business of hope and despair, of promise and postponement, began. For seven or eight weeks he lived most parsimoniously in lodgings; he gave them up when his funds ran low, and obtained permission from

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, III, 349.

<sup>8</sup> Soon after November 8, he received a letter from Lord Sligo addressed to him in Bangor. (*Memls.*, I, 49.)

Brunell to make use of his large house as a nightly asylum from the open.<sup>9</sup> He gained this so easily that he only regretted that he had not asked for it before his money had been so depleted. For now he had nothing with which to buy blankets, sorely needed; and he suffered the agony of nightly cold — supreme amongst all the hardships and bitter inheritances of flesh that men are called upon to face. But he had at least a roof over him in that Greek Street house;<sup>10</sup> and he found a companion in a pathetic, friendless child, apparently ten years old. Together they slept upon the floor with a bundle of law-papers for a pillow, but with no other covering than a horseman's cloak, an old sofa-cover, and a ragged piece of rug. 'The poor child,' he writes, 'crept close to me for warmth, and for security against her ghostly enemies. When I was not more than usually ill, I took her into my arms, so that in general, she was tolerably warm and often slept when I could not; for during the last two months of my sufferings, I slept much in the day-time, and was apt to fall into transient dozings at all hours. But my sleep distressed me more than my watching; for besides the tumultuousness of my dreams (which were only not so awful as those which I shall have hereafter to describe as produced by opium) my sleep was never more than what is called *dog-sleep*; so that I could hear myself moaning; and very often I was awakened by my own voice. About this time, a hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into a slumber, which has since returned upon me at different periods of my life — viz. a sort of twitching (I knew not where, but apparently about the region of the stomach) which compelled me violently to throw out my feet for the sake of relieving it. This sensation coming on as soon as I began to sleep, and the effort to relieve it constantly awakening me, at length I slept only from exhaustion; and through

<sup>9</sup> This account in the final version of the *Confessions* seems more probable than that in the original one in which he says, 'For the first two months in London, I was houseless, and very seldom slept under a roof.' (Garnett, p. 32.)

<sup>10</sup> 'The house in which the Opium Eater lived . . . rent free, and which is in a street leading out of Oxford Street, is in Greek Street, and the house is the corner house in that street, partly in the square, on the right hand as you go down from Oxford Street. The master had other offices elsewhere at which he carried on his game. He went by several names.' (Woodhouse, in Garnett, p. 208.) See also *Works*, III, 358.

increasing weakness (as I said before), I was constantly falling asleep and constantly awaking.' <sup>11</sup>

During the day he seems to have sat on park-benches and to have wandered about aimlessly; and thus, he says, 'I naturally fell in more frequently with those female peripatetics who are technically called street-walkers. Some of these woman had occasionally taken my part against watchmen who wished to drive me off the steps of houses where I was sitting; others had protected me against more serious aggressions.' To one among them, 'ministering to my necessities when all the world stood aloof from me — I owe it that I am at this time alive. For many weeks, I had walked with this poor friendless girl [Ann] up and down Oxford Street, or had rested with her on steps and under the shelter of porticos.' She had not completed her sixteenth year.

'One night, when we were pacing slowly along Oxford Street, and after a day when I had felt unusually ill and faint, I requested her to turn off with me into Soho Square. Thither we went; and we sat down on the steps of a house, which to this hour I never pass without a pang of grief, and an inner act of homage to the spirit of that unhappy girl, in memory of the noble act which she there performed. Suddenly, as we sat, I grew much worse. I had been leaning my head against her bosom, and all at once I sank from her arms, and fell backwards on the steps. From the sensations I then had, I felt an inner conviction of the liveliest kind that, without some powerful and reviving stimulus, I should either have died on the spot, or should, at least, have sunk to a point of exhaustion from which all re-ascent, under my friendless circumstances, would soon have become hopeless. Then it was, at this crisis of my fate, that my poor orphan companion, who had herself met with little but injuries in this world, stretched out a saving hand to me. Uttering a cry of terror, but without a moment's delay, she ran off into Oxford Street, and, in less time than could be imagined, returned to me with a glass of port-wine and spices, that acted upon my empty stomach (which at that time would have rejected all solid food) with an instantaneous power of restoration; and for this glass the generous girl, without a murmur, paid out of her own humble purse, at a time, be it remembered, when she had scarce wherewithal to purchase the bare necessities of life, and when she could have no reason to expect that I should ever be able to reimburse her.' <sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Works*, III, 355.

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, III, 361 ff.

This was the culmination of sleepless nights, starvation, and hope deferred. But 'soon after the period of the last incident I have recorded, I met in Albemarle Street a gentleman of his late Majesty's household,' who had 'received hospitalities on different occasions, from my family: and he challenged me upon the strength of my family likeness. I did not attempt any disguise, but answered his questions ingenuously; and, on his pledging his word of honour that he would not betray me to my guardians, I gave him my real address in Greek Street. Next day I received from him a ten-pound bank-note.' <sup>13</sup>

De Quincey had fallen into desperate poverty, such as he was not to know again until his Edinburgh days. He might have applied to his family for help — but his fear of being sent back to school prevented that. He did not know the addresses of the few old business acquaintances of his father still living in London. Perhaps any one else *might* have found them out. He might have sought a job in which his not inconsiderable talents would have enabled him to earn a living. He might, he assures us, have made a proof-reader — a proof-reader of Greek, especially. He says he lacked patience to make a good one — he would have been found lacking in the graces required 'for dancing attendance upon crotchety authors, superstitiously fastidious in matters of punctuation' <sup>14</sup> — a strange comment to make in the light of later efforts over the proofs of Wordsworth's pamphlet and his own essays. But, he assures us, he had no introduction to respectable publishers — all of which is, of course, what the modern psychologist calls 'rationalization.' But 'To say the truth, it never once occurred to me to think of literary labours as a source of profit' — nor, be it added, of any others. 'No mode sufficiently speedy of obtaining money had ever suggested itself but that of borrowing it on the strength of my future claims and expectations.' And considering his own environment and training, his inexperience and character, nothing else *was* possible. After all, he was not yet seventeen! But helpless as he was to earn a living, he showed in his determination to gain and maintain freedom to live his own life a certain

<sup>13</sup> *Works*, III, 362.

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, III, 364.

sort of heroism. If he failed it was because the odds were too much for him, not because his will was weak.

The Jew to whom he had applied for the loan was one Dell, later apparently well known as a lender to men of high station. De Quincey's property expectations were easily verified by the lenders; but the identification of himself as the second son of his father was not so easy. But he had with him various letters addressed to him by his friends — most of them from the Earl of Altamont (formerly Lord Westport) dated from Eton; and some from the Marquis of Sligo, his father. As a result, the money-lenders agreed finally to accept his security if he could persuade Altamont to guarantee the payments on their joint coming of age — Altamont was two or three years younger than De Quincey. Thus eight or nine days after receiving the bank-note from his friend of Albemarle Street, De Quincey set off for Eton to see what could be done. He spent 15 s. in re-establishing (though in a very humble way) his dress, and gave Ann a quarter of what was left after paying further fees to Brunell of a guinea. Together Ann and he walked to Golden Square and said farewell, arranging to meet on the fifth night after, at six o'clock, near the bottom of Great Titchfield Street. Thomas took the Bristol Mail at the Gloucester Coffee-house in Piccadilly. Utterly worn out, he fell asleep on the top of the coach and was carried beyond his station. He crawled back towards Eton, walking from 11 P.M. to 4 A.M.; and finally falling asleep on the road between Slough and Eton, he did not awake until dawn.

At eight he approached the school, only to find that Altamont had gone to Jesus College, Cambridge. '*Ibi omnis effusus labor.*' But he knew Lord Desart slightly — he had presumably met him when he was at Eton before; he called upon him and was invited to breakfast; but he could not eat. 'I had, unfortunately,' he says, 'at all times' — i.e. during these painful London months — 'a craving for wine.' He explained his longing to Lord Desart, and Lord Desart called for wine. This gave him instantaneous relief and immoderate pleasure. But he could not bring himself to ask of Lord Desart the favour he had intended to ask of Altamont. 'I

hope it was not from this love of wine,' he goes on, 'that I lingered in the neighbourhood of my Eton friends; I persuaded myself *then* that it was from reluctance to ask Lord Desart, on whom I was conscious of having no sufficient claims, the particular service in quest of which I had come to Eton.' At last he made his request, and Desart faltered at granting it, but finally consented on certain conditions. With this modified success De Quincey returned to London, three days after leaving it.

## II

BUT the Jews did not agree to Lord Desart's conditions; many further delays were made, and De Quincey was well on his way to his previous state of wretchedness, when suddenly at this crisis an opening was made almost by accident for reconciliation with his guardians. He quitted London in haste, and returned to the Priory.<sup>15</sup>

Of the sudden reconciliation with his family nothing is known; but there is a letter preserved for us from his guardian, Mr. Hall,<sup>16</sup> which does not quite fit into the narrative of the *Confessions*. This is dated 7 January 1803, and De Quincey had written to him before that, since the letter is a reply. De Quincey had obviously been obliged to sound out his guardians as to their plans; but Mr. Hall wrote that the guardians had no new proposal to make, but were willing to consider any plans of his which might seem entitled to notice. Did De Quincey write Mr. Hall directly or ask for information through his mother or Mr. Kelsall? In any case, his friends must have known how to address him. At least Thomas neither asked nor received from them pecuniary help in January—and Mr. Hall's letter gives no indication whatever that the guardians were even considering the possibility of forcing him to return to Manchester. According to the *Confessions*, Thomas met his family friend on Albemarle Street late in February, or early March: next day he received the ten pounds; eight or nine days later he left for Eton and stayed away from London for three days. Then elapsed an indefinite time, but the impression given is that it was not

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, III, 374.

<sup>16</sup> *Memls.*, I, 91.

long. And finally came the reconciliation and return to Chester before March 23.<sup>17</sup> The details we do not know, but we can speculate with some degree of probability as to the terms which made the reconciliation possible. They were, patently, that Thomas should not be forced back to Manchester Grammar School; that he should be allowed to go to Everton for a time until future plans could be mutually agreed upon; and that he should meanwhile receive an allowance sufficient for him to live comfortably there. His London venture, in so far as he had hoped to make arrangements to live in the metropolis independent of parent and guardians, had been in vain; but he had, at least, asserted and finally won his freedom from arbitrary interference.

He never again found Ann. He sought her daily throughout the brief remnant of his stay in London, at the corner of Titchfield Street where they had agreed to meet. He knew the street where she lodged but not the house. He knew before he left for Eton that she had received ill-treatment from her landlord; and Thomas feared that she had moved away in his absence. She had few acquaintances, and Thomas knew none of them. He left his own address at the Priory, Chester, with a person who, he thought, must recognize Ann by sight. But all his efforts were fruitless. Thus ends abruptly the story of De Quincey's London episode of the winter of 1802-3. But it left an indelible influence upon his consciousness, and Ann was to figure with vividness in recurring dreams.

<sup>17</sup> *Diary*, p. 147.



## CHAPTER VI EVERTON

1803

### I

ON 23 March 1803, Thomas was again living at Mrs. Best's, and dining daily as the guest of Mr. Cragg. It was the same arrangement as had been made during the spring of 1802, just before his departure from the Manchester Grammar School. And here with Mrs. Best and Mr. Cragg he continued until sometime in July.<sup>1</sup>

During these months when he was, for a considerable part of the time, keeping a close record of his doings and his thoughts in his recently published *Diary*, he made no reference of any sort to his London experiences. It is as if they had never been. There is one allusion to his vacation in Wales — one indirect reference — which indicates that his memories of that were pleasant.<sup>2</sup> But of his life in London, there is not a word. This fact is puzzling at first; for if the London episode was as terrible as it appears to have been in the *Confessions*, how could he, only a few months later, ignore completely all that he had gone through? One almost, for a moment, questions whether the whole episode were not a dream, at least in its lurid aspects as we know them. But there is another and, I think, a sounder way of explaining the omission; and that is, that the whole experience was so harrowing that he shrank from even thinking about it.

He was now concerned with books, with walks, with friends, with an occasional dream, with a plot of a novel or of a drama; but there was comparatively little brooding upon his own sufferings, even though he jotted down an occasional item that he ate or did not eat this or that, that he drank or did not drink this or that, and spoke a few times of his unhappiness and misery. He had a touch of indigestion; but, again, there is no indication — and this is perhaps more important, and still more puzzling — that his health was broken or in a pre-

<sup>1</sup> *Mems.*, I, 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, p. 208.

carious condition; no hint that the fearful paroxysms in his sleep were still haunting him. Even the effects of ill health which were so minutely recorded at Manchester Grammar School and again in London, seem to have vanished. Was there quick recovery? Were the symptoms, which later recur in his life, here in abeyance during this time of regular living? Were the actual experiences of the *Confessions* stressed as mere artistic preliminaries leading up to the climactic agonies? However one answers such questions, one must remember that at this time, in the spring of 1803, De Quincey could not in any way have seen his immediate past and his immediate future as the continuous pattern which was later to develop into the settled terrors of the next decade.

His life at Everton was a simple one. He had a few acquaintances there. Mr. Cragg seems to have been an old family friend, but, like so many other of the family friends, he had little in common with his young guest. The *Diary* is scattered through with impatient and scornful comments upon him. The circle which gave the boy really congenial society was that of a Mr. and Mrs. Wright. Mr. Wright was a bookseller and publisher who lived in Liverpool over his shop. Thomas became more and more a frequenter of his house. He found the couple, especially Mrs. Wright, sympathetic. Through them he came to know a considerable number of people, of the middle class to be sure, but not uninterested in ideas. At the Wrights' he read aloud to the ladies endless books and poems. With Mrs. Wright and a Mrs. Edmonds he was constantly walking. With them he went to the theatre, to see Charles Young in *Hamlet*, for instance. He even suggested a trip with them into Wales! Among the other persons who became Thomas's friends, was a Mr. Merritt, a partner of Mr. Wright of the firm of Merritt and Wright, 60 Castle Street. While the Wrights disappear in later years from his life, we hear now and again of Mr. Merritt. In 1814, Mr. Merritt and his wife visited Grasmere and were guests of De Quincey at Dove Cottage;<sup>3</sup> and in a work of 1824 — *The Dialogues of Three Templars* — De Quincey referred to him as 'a very able friend of mine in

<sup>3</sup> *Memls.*, II, 38.

Liverpool.' Certainly during the Grasmere days, De Quincey frequently stopped in Liverpool on his way to and from the south; and now and then we know that his address while in Liverpool was in care of Mr. Merritt.

On this third visit to Everton, there is no indication whatever that he associated at all with the Liverpool coterie of which he had caught a glimpse in 1801. There is no mention of Mr. Roscoe, of Dr. Currie, or of Mr. Shepherd — no, nor of Mr. Clarke. Certainly there were no rendezvous for reading Aeschylus in the early morning; no dinners, no interchange of books.

## II

DE QUINCEY did not use the Liverpool public library at all. He did, however, frequent the circulating libraries, of which in Everton and Liverpool there were four or five; and from them, and from the private libraries of his friends, he borrowed regularly; and he duly recorded every book for some six weeks. His reading was distinctly of the lighter sort. The only work of dignity and length mentioned is Cowper's translation of the *Iliad*, which he read day by day to the very end. He was not reading Greek nor Latin. On the contrary, he confined himself to novels — Charlotte Smith's, Mrs. Radcliffe's, Sophia Lee's, Mrs. Jane West's; or to plays — Mary Stewart, *Dramatic Pieces from the German*; or to memoirs — Mrs. Robinson's; or to poetry. In literary acquirement, he was distinctly loitering.

The *Diary* opens with a fragmentary essay upon 'His Bodily Discipline.' It was apparently written not for himself, but was addressed 'to those who honestly sigh for a treatise practically useful.' It is systematic with its definite heads, placed in the manner we are so familiar with in his later essays: '1 Gymnastic Exercises; 2 Saltatory Exercises; 3 Bathing Exercises; 4 Manual Labours.' It contains little that is interesting in itself; it is, however, strikingly connected with his strenuous complaints of lack of exercise which drove him to despair and revolt at the Manchester Grammar School; but it not less strikingly omits any references to long tramps. There is one passage in this essay, however, which is notable for an-

other reason — its strange romanticism: 'All exercises further our main objects by producing on the mind these two effects. 1. Continually calling forth (and thus invigorating) the passions; 2. by relieving — varying — and so rendering more exquisite those fits of visionary and romantic luxuriating or of tender pensive melancholy — the necessary and grand accompaniments of that state of mind to which this system of education professes to lead [the reader].'

The *Diary* gives a list of the works which he has at some time or other seriously intended to execute, but which he had never finished, probably had never begun. 'They were works which had been buzzing in his head during those wanderings in Wales and London, and during his school days.'

He proposed three dramas — poetic and pathetic; two pathetic tales — one with a black man as the hero (reminis-

<sup>4</sup> 'The following is a list of the works which I have, at some time or other, seriously intended to execute:

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. <i>Ethelfrid</i> , a drama;   | } Poetic and pathetic. |
| 2. <i>Yermak the Rebel</i> , a drama;  |                        |
| 3. <i>Paul</i> , a drama;  |                        |
| 4. <i>A pathetic tale</i> , of which a black man is the hero;  |                        |
| 5. <i>A pathetic tale</i> , of which an Englishman is the hero;  |                        |
| 6. <i>An essay on poetry</i> ;   |                        |
| 7. <i>An essay on character</i> ;  |                        |
| 8. <i>A life of Catiline</i> ;   |                        |
| 9. <i>A life of Julius Caesar</i> ;  |                        |
| 10. <i>A poetic and pathetic ballad</i> reciting the wanderings of two young children (brother and sister) and their falling asleep on a frosty night — moon-light among the lances . . . and so perishing. (I projected this at Bath; — I think, a few weeks before my going to Ireland.)                               |                        |
| 11. <i>A pathetic poem</i> describing the emotions (strange and wild) of a man dying on a rock in the sea . . . which he had swum to from a ship-wreck . . . within sight of his native cottage and his paternal hills. (I believe that the idea of this poem . . . as here stated . . . was conceived before the last.) |                        |
| 12. <i>An ode</i> in which two angels or spirits were to meet in the middle of the Atlantic. (This too was one of my early designs . . . though posterior, I believe, to the tenth and eleventh.)  |                        |

I have sometimes thought too, though with less firmness of determination than on the preceding, that I would write —

1. *An essay on pathos*, as a counterpart to No. 6;
2. *An essay on French and English Character*, as a sequel and illustration of No. 7;
3. *Many different travels and voyages*.

I have besides always intended of course that *poems* should form the corner-stones of my fame; — but I do not (at this moment) recollect any subjects that I have chosen for my poetical efforts . . . except those already mentioned.' (*Diary*, p. 181.)

cent of the anti-slavery agitation of his youth, of his father's enthusiasm for the cause); a poetic and pathetic ballad; a pathetic poem — poetic or pathetic all! There were also some biographies and critical essays, travels and voyages. There was emotion on the one side; analytical criticism on the other. On the one side strong interest in poetry; on the other in prose, with poetry in the first place: — 'I have always intended, of course, that *poems* should form the corner stone of my fame.' But his accomplishment was humorously disproportionate to his ambition. There is but one actual poem which is mentioned in the *Diary* as completed — 'my own stanzas on May morning' which he read to Mrs. Wright without revealing its authorship; a mark of modesty not to be overlooked.<sup>5</sup>

In the spring of 1803 he was dreaming of creation, vaguely planning. Especially did he ponder over what he referred to as his 'Arabian Drama,' perhaps the Yermak of the list;<sup>6</sup> and over what he referred to as 'the novel,' with the heroine 'dying on an island of a lake, her chamber windows (opening on a lawn) set wide open — and the sweet blooming roses breathing y<sup>e</sup> odours on her dying senses;<sup>7</sup> 'and at midnight the spirit of Orellana stood before the judgment seat of God.'<sup>8</sup> Such fragments were set down under the dates when they occurred to him; but there was no effort to correlate or integrate the fragments; and we have no reason to suppose that anything resulted from his vague meditations and mild inspiration. His whole creative mind was idly playing with future possibilities. His mind was active, but lacking in purpose, in concentration, in creative power. There was as

<sup>5</sup> The only other verse by De Quincey, besides the Horatian translation of Winkfield days, and this poem of the *Diary*, of which I know, is a longish verse translation — 'Anna Louisa, A domestic Idyll, or Picture of rural life in the middle circle of Germany, Freely translated from the German of John Henry Voss,' in manuscript in the possession of Worcester College, Oxford. It was intended for *Blackwood's Magazine*; and its introduction is a Letter to Dr. Christopher North. It opens thus:

'In the month of June, beneath celestial azure  
Of skies all cloudless, sate the aged rector  
Of Esthwaite dining amidst his household.'

It ends with Canto I. It was never, so far as I know, finished.

In his letter to Wordsworth, 6 August 1803 (GW. MSS.), he speaks of a thought to send him some 'metrical trifles.' He never did.

<sup>6</sup> *Diary*, p. 176.

<sup>7</sup> *Diary*, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> *Diary*, p. 159.

yet neither inner urge, nor outer, to drive him perforce to production.

## III

BUT intellectually his mind was alert and ranging; the major emphasis of the *Diary* was not upon creation but upon analysis and criticism. He analyzed in that little essay 'His Bodily Discipline'; he sought to define tragedy, to differentiate un-mixed tragedy from poetical tragical drama. 'What is the essence and classification of Nature as distinct from *Pathos*, *Imagery*, etc.' <sup>9</sup> He differentiated French pathos from English by calling the one noisy, the other deep. He tried to compare the humour of Burns with that of Southey; he discussed at length the difference between the mercy and the justice of God; <sup>10</sup> he talked of the power of music.<sup>11</sup> Both in the record of his meditations and in that of his conversations, he showed an active and experimental mind, thinking for itself, trying to solve problems, not always clearly, but persistently. The *Diary* is the scrappy record of the intellectual gropings of a remarkable boy of seventeen.

There is a list of twelve poets, all of them English, who, with the late addition of David, seem to have represented for him the twelve best poets of all time, an early example of his insularity.

## POETS

Edmund Spenser;  
William Shakespeare;  
John Milton;  
James Thomson;  
Williams Collins;  
Thomas Chatterton;  
James Beattie;  
Robert Burns;  
William Penrose;  
Robert Southey;  
S. T. Coleridge;  
William Wordsworth!!!

Q. Gray? A. No.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Diary*, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Diary*, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> *Diary*, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> *Diary*, p. 145.

Note the three marks of exclamation after Wordsworth. Gray is specifically ruled out. Curious is the inclusion of William Penrose (by error for *Thomas* Penrose), a poet of the neighbourhood of Bath and Clifton, who took De Quincey's fancy, perhaps, from the local nature of his reputation; but one whom he later in the note-book rejected as writing from understanding rather than from imagination.

The *Diary* is a complete confirmation of his admiration for the three poets who close the list. Southey he constantly referred to and read, partly, apparently because he was fortunate enough in Liverpool to buy a volume of the poems at reduced price and it was at hand. Coleridge he looked upon as almost the greatest. He walks home 'thinking of Coleridge: am in transports of love and admiration for him. . . I begin to think him the greatest man that has ever appeared.'<sup>13</sup> But it is Wordsworth who received the triple distinction in the list; *The Brothers* brought out another exclamation — 'ah, what pathos!' and it was to Wordsworth he wrote the letter we are soon to see which initiated the long relationship so important in De Quincey's life. True, he read none of Wordsworth to Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Edmonds. Perhaps he had no volume with him; but more likely he hesitated to risk finding unsympathetic ears for poems which were so dear to him, remembering how Lady Carbery had laughed at the *Ancient Mariner*.

## IV

IN the *Diary* are two drafts for the first letter to Wordsworth, one written on May 13, and rejected; the other written on May 31, copied word for word, and sent off on that same day.<sup>14</sup>

May 31, 1803.

Sir,

I suppose that most men would think what I am going to say . . . strange at least or rude: but I am bold enough to imagine that, as you are not yourself "in the roll of common men," you may be willing to excuse anything uncommon in the liberty I am now taking.

<sup>13</sup> *Diary*, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> The original letter in the possession of Mr. Gordon Wordsworth is identical in phrasing with the second draft.

My object in troubling you, Sir, is that hereafter I may have the satisfaction of recollecting that I made one effort at least for obtaining your notice . . . and that I did not, through any want of exertion on my own part, miss that without which what good can my life do me? I have no other motive for soliciting your friendship than what (I should think) every man, who has read and felt the "Lyrical Ballads," must have in common with me. There is no need that I should express my admiration and love for those delightful poems; nor is it possible that I should do so. Besides, I am persuaded that the dignity of your moral character sets you as far above the littleness of any vanity which could be soothed by applause feeble and insignificant as mine . . . as the transcendency of your genius makes all applause fall beneath it. But I may say in general, without the smallest exaggeration, that the whole aggregate of pleasure I have received from some eight or nine other poets that I have been able to find since the world began . . . falls infinitely short of what those two enchanting volumes [The second edition, 1800, was in two volumes.] have singly afforded me; — that your name is with me for ever linked to the lovely scenes of nature; — and that not yourself only but that each place and object you have mentioned . . . and all the souls in that delightful community of yours — to me

"are dearer than the sun!"

With such opinions, it is not surprising that I should so earnestly and humbly sue for your friendship; — it is not surprising that the hope of that friendship should have sustained me through two years of a life passed partially in the world . . . and therefore not passed in happiness; — that I should have breathed forth my morning and evening orisons for the accomplishment of that hope; — that I should now consider it as the only object worthy of my nature or capable of rewarding my pains. Sometimes, indeed, in the sad and dreary vacuity of worldly intercourse, this hope will touch those chords that have power to rouse me from the lethargy of despair; and sometimes, from many painful circumstances — many, many bitter recollections, it is my only refuge.

But my reason for seeking your regard . . . it would be endless to recount and (I am afraid) useless; for I do not forget that the motives to any intimacy must be mutual: and alas! to me, unknown and unhonored as I am, why should any one — the meanest of God's creatures — extend his friendship? What claim then can I urge to a fellowship with a society such as yours . . . beaming (as it does) with genius so wild and so magnificent? I dare not say that I too have some spark of that heavenly fire that blazes there; for, if I have, it has not yet kindled and shone out in any exertion which only could entitle



me to your notice. But, though I can show no positive pretensions to a gift so high, I may yet advance a few negative reasons why you may suffer me, if but at a distance, to buoy myself up with the idea that I am not wholly disregarded in your sight . . . when I say that my life has been passed chiefly in the contemplation and altogether in the worship of nature — that I am but a boy and have therefore formed no connection which could draw you one step farther from the sweet retreats of poetry to the detested haunts of men — that no one should ever dare, in confidence of any acquaintance he might have with me, to intrude on your hallowed solitude — and lastly that you would at any rate have an opportunity of offering to God the pleasant and grateful incense of a good deed by blessing the existence of a fellow-creature. As to all external points, I believe that there is nothing in them to disgrace you.

I cannot say anything more than that, though you may find many minds more congenial with your own, and therefore proportionably more worthy of your regard, you will never find anyone more zealously attached to you — more full of admiration for your mental excellence and of reverential love for your moral character — more ready (I speak from my heart) to sacrifice even his life . . . whenever it could have a chance of promoting your interest and happiness — than he who now bends the knee before you. And I will add that, to no man on earth except yourself and *one* other (a friend of your's), would I thus lowly and suppliantly prostrate myself.

Dear Sir!

Your's for ever,

Thomas De Quincey.<sup>15</sup>

Mrs. Best's, Everton,  
near Liverpool.

It is not a good letter; it is stilted, adulatory, strained. De Quincey, three months short of being eighteen, brought himself to address the man of all men whom he revered as the greatest poet of his own time, perhaps of all time. He with his sense of latent power was almost morbidly shy, and yet the admiration which had so mastered him, drove him to write, almost against his will, certainly against his natural tendency towards inaction, to carry out his intentions — 'that hereafter I may have the satisfaction of recollecting that I made one effort at least for obtaining your notice,' he wrote, ' . . . that I did not, through any want of exertion on

<sup>15</sup> *Diary*, pp. 185 ff. The series of dots do not indicate omissions. The letter was addressed to the care of Messrs. N. Longman and O. Rees, London.

my own part, miss that without which what good can life do me?' There is touching self-confession and timid eagerness in that. He assured Wordsworth that he had received more pleasure from the *Lyrical Ballads* than from the poems of the greatest poets of the world, i.e. from the list quoted above; and he sued for his friendship! 'Sometimes, indeed, in the sad and dreary vacuity of worldly intercourse, this hope will touch those chords that have power to rouse me from the lethargy of despair; and sometimes, from many painful circumstances — many, many bitter recollections, it is my only refuge.' Is this a hint at the London sufferings and his memories of them? He begged for recognition, he supplicated for friendship on his knees, he prostrated himself before Wordsworth — the only man but Coleridge before whom he would so bend. It is all very exaggerated; but at the same time with all its overstrained sentiment, it bears every mark of sincerity. This was no conventional worship of Wordsworth who was relatively unknown in 1803.

Wordsworth was away from home when this letter reached Grasmere, so that he did not answer it until July 27. De Quincey replied on August 6; and the correspondence was kept up irregularly until the two men met finally in 1807.

# v

THERE are in the *Diary* one or two singularly penetrative comments of De Quincey upon himself. Most notable is this: —

'Notes on my character, begun this evening, May the first, 1803, Sunday. A few days ago (I think during the course of last week) I became fully convinced that one leading trait in my mental character . . . is — *Facility of impression*. My hopes and fears are alternately raised and quelled by the minutest — the most trivial circumstances — the slightest words. Witness the dismay I used to feel on the approach of the holydays or any other festal period, if any person called it a long time until they would arrive and vice versa; tho', all along, I was fully sensible that the interval was not one moment lengthened by anything they could say. Witness the *moderation* in which I leave Mrs. W[right] if anything is said less flattering than on a preceding day: though, all the while, I am fully conscious that she does not regard me more or less on one day y<sup>e</sup> on

another. — Above all, witness the strong effects which striking descriptions of the *new sort* have (as e.g. 'Amazement in his van,' etc.). To me these are always paintings. Thus is my understanding triumphed over by my heart.' <sup>16</sup>

That is a pretty keen comment for a youth of seventeen. It reduces itself, naturally, to extreme sensitiveness; and that in turn is one of the master keys, if there are such, to the man. The impression of his words and acts upon others round him was of great importance to him. Thus in one incident in the *Diary* he failed to catch a French phrase spoken by a Mr. Benterjak. 'Go home very miserable on account of my betraying my want of skill in *French* before Mr. W. Mrs. E. and Mr. B. (N.B. I talked with Mr. Benterjak about Rousseau's *Emile* — *Julia* — *Social Contract*).' <sup>17</sup> Because he slipped on a French word, he exerted himself to show his learning in regard to a great French writer. He set down for psychological consideration three traits, which were obviously his own. 1. Susceptibility of impression — which above he called 'facility of impression'; 2. Irritability; and 3. Capability of being disgusted. 'Are these mental or moral? — Surely neither.' <sup>18</sup>

## VI

THE general impression made by the *Diary* is not that of despair and melancholy. De Quincey read much and with apparent delight; he moved constantly in the limited society of the Wrights. He meditated upon literary problems and political happenings. There was nothing mournful in the delightful, boyish letter to E. W. Grinfield which is preserved in rough draft. Grinfield had taken him to task for neglecting him in correspondence. There had been a certain coolness between them, and Grinfield wrote to him a letter of apology or of penitence for his complaint. De Quincey's reply is 'cocky.' 'Your letter gave me very great pleasure. I am always grieved to forfeit the friendship of any Englishman.' He acknowledged his dilatoriness. 'You were offended at my want of punctuality in writing; but that is a fault, my friend, of which I shall hardly be cured. . . . I am

<sup>16</sup> *Diary*, p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> *Diary*, p. 193.

<sup>18</sup> *Diary*, p. 210.

too well convinced that you are too "free — unbending — unservile" . . . to need reminding of it; that I am your friend is proof of it; for, with me, independence of actions — independence of words — independence of thoughts are the preliminaries of friendship. Surely, Grinfield, we are Englishmen: great and awful is our high prerogative.' <sup>19</sup> That was no note of despair. He was writing to a friend to whom he felt superior; there was pride in his attitude; and he rejoiced to feel that he was independent in act, word, and thought.

In the same way, he rejoiced in talk with his friends — all older than himself, but in whose company he again felt his superiority in mental equipment. He expressed pride in his family name and descent. In a recorded conversation, the ladies thought De Quincey 'a very beautiful name,' and Thomas set the fact down in his note-book with obvious pleasure. He was enjoying life in such moments. But on the other hand there were times of melancholy. In an undated letter, but contiguous to the date of April 12: — 'Mem. Last night my Chattertonian *μελαγχολία* state of mind returned for the first time this about two years; — at any rate, for the first time that I have remarked it.' <sup>20</sup> This was the first occasion on which this form of melancholy, whatever it may be, had seized him since he was piling up the misery which crushed him at the Manchester Grammar School. On May 27 he walked home from tea with the Wrights, between eleven and twelve o'clock 'in a state of exquisite misery' — due to nothing that had happened there. It had settled upon him so that he was unable to eat or talk, as the details of the *Diary* indicate. Mr. Wright had tried to discuss the drama with him, specifically *Othello* and *Hamlet*; and all De Quincey could say was 'Do you think so, Sir?: Yes, Sir, indeed.' <sup>21</sup> The fit lasted; for on May 28, he visited Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Edmonds. 'I amuse the ladies by saying that I wish there was some road down to hell by which I might descend for a short time . . . to save myself from a state of apathy — talk of the clouds which hang thick and heavy on my brain.' Misery might be bad, but apathy was worse. On June 9, 'on

<sup>19</sup> *Diary*, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Diary*, p. 183.

my expressing some abhorrence for my present mode of life (of which I had been talking, before Mrs. W. came in, to Mrs. E.) Mrs. W. says that, if I am unhappy, she wonders how any one else can expect to be otherwise. "No, no! it is not of misery, but of apathy and dullness that I complain," I answered; "misery is a glorious relief — a delight!" "Misery and apathy were two distinct things for him; presumably misery was physical; apathy, mental.

The apathy, or whatever we may call the mental unhappiness of this time, might well be explained by his maladjustment to his guardians and the world. The passionate desire for freedom which had contributed so largely to his elopement from the Manchester Grammar School, had won him his present situation; but uncertainty as to his future was still hanging over him. The Everton sojourn was simply *ad interim*. The correspondence with his mother and Mr. Hall was still continuing. De Quincey was indifferent, apathetic, and unco-operative; his mother made suggestions in vain and almost in desperation. De Quincey was in no situation for cheerfulness. He knew that he could not get what he wanted; but what *did* he want?

## VII

As early as 22 April 1803, his mother had come to accept the fact that Thomas's school career was definitely closed. Mr. Hall was now the unyielding factor to be reckoned with; and he was adamant, a stickler for obedience and reason, *his* reason, to the extent of even exasperating Mrs. Quincey herself. More than once she confessed that she could do nothing with him, either to get him to promise to allow Thomas the £150 a year which was expected for his college career, or to accept any plan for the future. She proposed that Thomas should go to Oxford on his school allowance; she would herself guarantee that sum. But had he not better go to Manchester to see Mr. Hall and try to persuade him to be reasonable? No; Thomas had learned from Mr. Kelsall that the guardians would prevent his going to college at all unless he should make 'concessions,' promises of actually entering a profession at the end of his course; and *that* Thomas was not prepared

to do. At last, however, in early July, he did write to Mr. Hall; but instead of making the required 'concession,' he offered merely an 'assurance,' ironically vague. 'I object to an absolute promise, not out of any desire to secure a decent method of evading my engagement, but because there appears something more than rashness in binding ourselves, by a solemn obligation, to perform what the uncertainty of human events hourly tells us we may never have the power of performing.' Probably Thomas was genuinely in doubt as to his own desires for the long future; more probably he had made up his mind to live on his income and to write, not an ideal which would appeal to his practical guardians. But the letter proved unsatisfactory; at least Mr. Hall seems never to have replied to it. Thus matters hung uncertain during the entire Everton period; and Thomas continued to live his purposeless months there, waiting vaguely, until in early August he returned to the Priory, Chester.<sup>22</sup>

### VIII

THERE has been preserved for us a sort of appendix to this Everton sojourn of 1803 in a sketch for an essay on 'The Constituents of Happiness.' De Quincey did not write it until 1805; but in it he developed certain ideas upon which, as the Diary reveals, he had been pondering two years before. It is important as throwing light upon his thought in this early period of his youth and deserves to be considered at some little length.

In August 1805 De Quincey made his first tour into the Lake country, trying to bring himself to the point of visiting Wordsworth at Grasmere in answer to cordial invitations by the poet; but his courage left him at Coniston. There he stayed, however, for some days, long enough to set down in half essay form, half outline, the little treatise,<sup>23</sup> dated Monday morning, 18 August 1805. The paper was not finished at Coniston, but was completed on 22 August after his return to Everton, where he had been staying again during that summer. In the *Diary* he had declared that he longed to be

<sup>22</sup> *Memls.*, I, 92 ff.; *Diary*, pp. 150, 166, 170, 209 f.

<sup>23</sup> *Page*, I, 107 ff.

'the means of implanting one germ of greatness in the mind of a fellow being;' and he had enumerated the sources of happiness as '1. Poetry; 2. Pathos; 3. Glory; 4. Love; 5. Benevolence; 6. Music.'<sup>24</sup> And here two years later, he was still meditating upon Happiness.

First: — 'A capacity for thinking — i.e. of abstraction and reverie' — in other words, the intellectual life of analysis and criticism; the very things which appear so clearly in the fragmentary *Diary*; and, also, the power of imagination and dreaming, seen in the same record of two years before.

Secondly: — 'The cultivation of an interest in all that concerns human life and human nature.' The category merely repeats the old sentiment of Terence; but it has substance in De Quincey's own experience — his talk with peasants and travellers in Wales, for example; his fondness for the crowded streets and markets of London on those Saturday nights when he was, as we shall see, indulging in opium. Whatever may have been his later habits of retirement and seclusion, however he may have shunned his fellows in Oxford, his interest in man at large, man in the lower ranks, was genuine. His very recognition of the profound rightness of the *Lyrical Ballads* must have sprung from this sympathy which so deeply inspired Wordsworth.

Thirdly: — 'A fixed, and not merely temporary, residence in some spot of eminent beauty.' Here is a longing for something which his own vague wanderings had not given. It was, moreover, exactly what Wordsworth had found; and here before De Quincey can have had any real thought of settling in Grasmere, in a spot of eminent beauty, we have the longing for a rooted retirement. Frequent change of abode, he goes on, is unfavourable to the growth of local attachment which must exercise on any mind, but more especially on a contemplative mind, a most beneficial influence. But local attachment must naturally be bound up with beauty as a powerful assistant to the fancy.

Solitude, interesting society, and books follow; and then: — 'Some great intellectual project, to which all intellectual pursuits may be made tributary.' We have here an echo of a

<sup>24</sup> *Diary*, p. 152.

letter of Wordsworth to De Quincey in March 1804<sup>25</sup> in which Wordsworth tells of his great work, the history of his life, which 'will not be published these many years, and never during my lifetime, till I have finished a larger and more important work to which it is tributary. . . To this work I mean to devote the prime of my life and the chief force of my mind.'

Heading 9 is curious. 'A vast predominance of contempt, varied with only so much of action as the feelings may prompt by way of relief and invigoration to the faculty of contempt.' Presumably this 'contempt' is hardly more than indifference to the criticisms of his fellows, self-sufficiency in the presence of dispraise, the sense of inward power unshaken of the world. I think we may see here again the reflection of Wordsworth — the poet carped at and made the butt of jest, yet finely indifferent and superior. Wordsworth had written to De Quincey in the previous year<sup>26</sup> of some crass plagiarism and clumsy parody of his *Lyrical Ballads* by one Peter Bailey with that lofty indifference which is here meant by 'contempt.' It also reflects De Quincey's attitude of aloofness which he was so persistently to maintain at Oxford.

There follows: 'Emancipation from worldly cares, anxieties, and connections, and from all that is comprehended under the term business.' This expresses the aspiration of a young man who had in looking forward to attaining his majority been singularly pestered by financial distresses, partly forced upon him by the sheer cruelty, as he calls it, of his guardians, and by his attempts to escape into freedom by ill-considered means. Had he known what was before him, he might have given this point greater emphasis. But again, Wordsworth was living the ideal in actuality — the very antithesis of the materialism of Manchester against which De Quincey had reacted at the grammar school.

Eleventh. 'The education of a child.' This is startling; yet, although we have had little opportunity up to this time to point it out, his love of children was from first to last one of his very deepest and most human traits. In the *Diary* of 1803,

<sup>25</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 161.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 162.



the boy of seventeen speaks with tenderness of one little William K. Williams, a child of an acquaintance whom he occasionally met; and he records again and again some such item as 'Ride little William K. Williams on my shoulders.'<sup>27</sup> We shall see how devoted he was to the small Wordsworth children, and how devoted they were to him. He speaks here from his own inner nature.

Twelfth. 'A personal appearance tolerably respectable' — not necessarily attractive — 'but so far not repulsive, and on a level with the persons of men in general, as that though, apart from the intellectual superiority of its owner, there should be nothing to excite interest — there should, on that superiority being made known, and a consequent interest [excited?], be nothing in its general effect to contradict that interest.' Here he speaks again from personal feeling; from sensitiveness to his own diminutive size, which stirs him to the assertion of intellectual ability and power in order to excel by way of compensation. But defects of person are after all beyond individual correction, and he adds: — 'Where such moderate advantages as these, however, are wanting, this may be best compensated — (1) By that temperate and unostentatious dignity of manners and general tranquillity and composure of behaviour which bespeaks a mind at peace with itself.'

On the journey back to Everton from Coniston, he still pondered upon the theme of Happiness, for on his return he added a few new items.

Nature gives all men in early youth happiness from mere excess of animal joy and spirits; but 'this she withdraws in regular progression with the advancement of the intellect, and through the *instrumentality* of that very intellect.' It is the duty of man to supply a permanent stimulus at this period of withdrawal, and yet, 'at this crisis it is that wisdom most fails the souls of men; for at this period most men begin to resort to liquors and the turbulent bustle of the world to give a feverish warmth to their else feverish spirits. This is obviously every way a low and ruinous stimulus.' Perhaps this is an indirect reference to the opium which he is taking. But he

<sup>27</sup> *Diary*, p. 173.

goes on, some stimulus is necessary, and it remains to enquire *what?* ' And this I answer, that I am firmly persuaded that there is none but a deep interest in these exhaustless and most lofty subjects of *human life* and *human nature* ' — and such ministers as moral science, history, voyages, literature — and all fine fictions. Hence arises — he is again tutored by his own experience — a gradual interest in other classes of books. This he illustrates from two facts in his own life: — (1) the sudden growth of interest in political science at Everton in the spring of 1805; and (2) his desire to read history, voyages, etc.

Then in a last sentence he suggests as aids to happiness, ' two or three local and a few personal attachments ' — his only mention, strangely enough, of friendship or of love; and these are added as a kind of postscript or afterthought.

## CHAPTER VII

### OXFORD

1803-1808

#### I

ON TUESDAY, 2 August 1803, Thomas left Everton and returned to Chester, where on the sixth he wrote in his second letter to Wordsworth, 'I am going within a month or two to enter myself at Oxford.' It was settled, then; but whether his guardians would allow him £150 a year was still in doubt.

The interval at home until his departure southward was not a happy one. His mother had relaxed her extreme resentment at his repeated acts of rebellion; yet she could not dispel the general atmosphere of evangelical severity, nor conceal entirely her disapprobation of her erring son. On the other hand, Thomas, in spite of his affection, looked upon his mother and the society in which she moved with the superiority of a young scholar, intolerant of what he considered inferior or boresome. Then there was his uncle also to reckon with; a man of action, pressing his opinions with military haste and tumultuous energy, impervious to the qualifications and subtleties of his argumentative nephew. Discussions became heated and impossible; and discussion was the breath of life to the young man. Furthermore, De Quincey wrote, 'I still occupied the position of a reputed boy, nay, a child, in the estimation of my audience, and of a child in disgrace. Time enough had not passed since my elopement from school to win for me, in minds fresh from that remembrance, a station of purification and assuagement. . . . I committed, besides, a great fault in taking often a tone of mock seriousness, when the detection of the playful extravagance was left to the discernment or quick sympathy of the hearer; and I was blind to the fact, that neither my mother nor my uncle was distinguished by any liveliness of vision for the comic, nor any toleration for the extravagant.' Even upon so detached a

topic as India, of which there was much talk, Thomas opposed cherished ideas of his elders and puzzled, if not exasperated, them.

Colonel Penson was fond of De Foe, and he was reading the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, 'in some places an unfair, and everywhere a most superficial account. I said so; and my uncle . . . opposed me with asperity; and in the course of what he said, under some movement of ill-temper, he asked me, in a way which I felt to be taunting, how I could consent to waste my time as I did. Without any answering warmth, I explained that my guardians, having quarreled with me, would not grant for my use anything beyond my school allowance of £100 per annum. But was it not possible that even that sum might by economy be made to meet the necessities of the case? I replied that, from what I had heard, very probably it was. Would I undertake Oxford upon some such terms? Most gladly, I said.<sup>1</sup> Upon that opening, he spoke to my mother; and the result was that, within seven days from the above conversation, I found myself entering that time-honored university.' He would wait no more upon the delays of Mr. Hall.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas reached Oxford early in December. Next day he assembled all the acquaintances whom he had at the University — besides young Grinfield I am at a loss to name them — and asked the question, 'What college would they, in their superior state of information, recommend to my choice?' Through all the months of discussion as to his going to Oxford there had been no serious consideration of the college to be chosen!<sup>3</sup>

'Supposing other things equal,' he says, 'I greatly preferred the most populous college, as being that in which any single

<sup>1</sup> Driven doubtless by the discomforts of the situation, he accepted finally what he had been indifferent to, namely, the opportunity of going to Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, I, 410 ff.; Mr. Hall was still unwilling to exceed the school allowance on 27 January 1804, *Memls.*, I, 107; and apparently he never weakened so long as Thomas was a minor.

<sup>3</sup> 'I came thither in solitary, self-dependence, and in the loosest state of indetermination. Every single point in my future position and connection, to what college I would attach myself, and in which of the two orders, open to my admission, I would enrol myself, was left absolutely to my own election.' *Life and Manners*, p. 228.

member, who might have reasons for standing aloof from the general habits of expense, of intervisiting, etc., would have the best chance of escaping a jealous notice.' The second desideratum, which held a 'high place' in his estimation, was a chapel with good music. 'All the colleges have chapels, but all have not organs; nor, amongst those which have, is the same large use made of the organ. Some preserve the full cathedral service; others do not.'<sup>4</sup> Christ Church fulfilled all conditions, and thither he resolved to go. Instead of sending a letter of application to the Dean, he sought an interview directly with the great Dr. Cyril Jackson; and without a tremor he entered the presence and, as he thought, *almost* gained admission in spite of the fact that there was a long list of waiting applicants ahead of him.

A few days passed in thoughtless indecision. Then as his pocket money began to run low, the trivial matter of 'caution money,' being the sum deposited with the college upon matriculation as a pledge for meeting unsettled arrears, became the determining fact in his choice. In most colleges this was £25; at Worcester College it was considerably less; and rather than ask for more money from home, De Quincey chose Worcester. The college was comparatively small; the chapel possessed no organ and no musical service; and at that time, Worcester was in poor repute.<sup>5</sup> 'It has indeed the character of being very riotous,' Thomas wrote to Wordsworth in March 1804; 'but I cannot see that it deserves such a character pre-eminently — though its discipline is certainly less strict than that of any other college. But it is singularly barren (so far as my short residence here will permit me to judge) of either virtue or talents or knowledge.'<sup>6</sup> But for good or ill, he was entered at Worcester College on 17 December 1803.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, II, 24.

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, II, 29.

<sup>6</sup> GW. MSS. 31 March 1804; and Garnett, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, II, 79. De Quincey had three sets of rooms at one time or another. 'The first rooms assigned me, being small and ill-lighted, as part of an old Gothic building, were charged at 4 guineas a year. These I soon exchanged for others a little better, and for them I paid 6 guineas a year. Finally, by privilege of seniority, I obtained a handsome set of well proportioned rooms in a modern section of the college, charged at 10 guineas a year.' *Works*, II, 29.

## II

SOLITUDE was to be his fate at the University as well as his desire. The consciousness that he was far poorer than most of his fellows forced upon him a feeling of inferiority which is pointed for us by one incident that he tells with humour in recollection. He was habitually careless of dress; and at college 'I wore clothes until they were threadbare — partly in the belief that my gown would conceal their main defects, but much more from carelessness and indisposition to spend upon a tailor what I had destined for a bookseller.' An official person sent a protest through a friend, and Thomas resolved to mend. 'But always it happened that some book, or set of books, — that passion being absolutely endless, and inexorable as the grave, — stepped between me and any intentions; until one day, upon arranging my toilet hastily before dinner, I suddenly made the discovery that I had no waistcoat . . . which was not torn or otherwise delapidated; whereupon, buttoning up my coat to the throat, and drawing my gown as close about me as possible, I went into the public "hall" . . . with no misgiving. However, I was detected; for a grave man, with a superlatively grave countenance, who happened on that day to sit next me, but whom I did not personally know, addressing his friend sitting opposite, begged to know if he had seen the last Gazette, because he understood that it contained an Order in Council laying an interdict upon the future use of waistcoats. His friend replied, with the same perfect gravity, that it was a great satisfaction to his mind that his Majesty's Government had issued so sensible an order; which he trusted would be soon followed up by an interdict on breeches, they being still more disagreeable to pay for. This said, without the movement on either side of a single muscle, the two gentlemen passed to other subjects. . . . This was the sole personality or equivocal allusion of any sort, which ever met my ear during the years that I asserted my right to be as poor as I chose.' <sup>8</sup> But none the less we cannot escape the fact

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, II, 14. His money at Oxford was closely limited to the hundred pounds of his school allowance. Up to 1806, when he attained his majority and came into his inheritance, he had recourse to money-lenders to borrow upon the reversion of his patrimony. These loans at exorbitant rates of in-

that his poverty was present in his mind to colour consciously or unconsciously his entire university career.

But there were far deeper reasons to account for his solitude. 'There was one reason why I sought solitude at that early age,' he writes of his undergraduate days, 'and sought it in a morbid excess, which must naturally have conferred upon my character some degree of that interest which belongs to all extremes. My eye had been couched into a secondary power of vision, by misery, by solitude, by sympathy with life in all its modes, by experience too early won, and by the sense of danger critically escaped. Suppose the case of a man suspended by some colossal arm over an unfathomed abyss, — suspended, but finally withdrawn, — it is probable that he would not smile for years. That was my case. . . Past experience of a very peculiar kind, the agitations of many lives crowded into the compass of a year or two, in combination with a peculiar structure of mind, offered one explanation of the very remarkable and unsocial habits which I adopted at college.' <sup>9</sup>

Add as another reason for living his life alone, that innate pride in his own self-sufficiency, in his intellectual superiority; making him look upon his fellow undergraduates with the certainty that he should be disappointed in them. He was naturally shy; he was younger than most, even though far more experienced in the evils of the world; and he was poor. No wonder that he hardly entered into the social life of the parties to which he was at first invited; that he felt out of place in 'a drinking, rattling set, whose conversation was juvenile, commonplace and quite unintellectual.' He had the manners to invite some of his fellows once or twice in return for invitations, and then dropped intercourse. Thus in a short time he came to be looked upon as a strange being

terest, as high as 17½%, cost him £600 when he received his fortune. (*Memls.*, II, 112).

It is worth recording that among the BS. MSS. is a letter from his uncle (Japp, p. 101, where the date is wrongly given as 1808) dated from Saharunpoor, 12 January 1805 which is in answer to one from Thomas refusing financial help. 'Rest assured I shall not invade the independence you desire to maintain,' Colonel Penon wrote. (BS. MSS.)

<sup>9</sup> *Works*, II, 55 ff.

who associated with no one. Yet we know faintly of a few friendly relations with individuals; with one Schwartzburg, who is reported to have taught him German and some Hebrew; with one Millar, who at the end of their course joined Thomas in reading for honours; with a tutor by the name of Jones — *not* his first tutor, but one for whom he had such feeling that he was willing out of a desire to please him to work for honours; and with one Smith who is hardly so much as a name. They are all shadowy. He was practically alone during his whole Oxford career.

The peculiar nature of his studies and his intellectual interests not less made for his aloofness. He was left pretty much to himself in the easy way apparently possible at the beginning of the last century, so far, at least, as his tutors were concerned. He tells of one interview — the first and the last he ever had with his first tutor. ‘It consisted of three sentences, two of which fell to his share, one to mine. On a fine morning, he met me in the Quadrangle, and, having then no guess as to the nature of my pretensions, he determined (I suppose) to probe them. Accordingly, he asked me, “What I had been lately reading?” Now, the fact was that I, at that time immersed in metaphysics, had really been reading and studying very closely the *Parmenides*, of which obscure work some Oxford man, early in the last century, published a separate edition. Yet, so profound was the benignity of my nature that, in those days, I could not bear to witness, far less to cause, the least pain or mortification to any human being. I recoiled, indeed, from the society of most men, but not with any feelings of dislike. On the contrary, in order that I *might* like all men, I wished to associate with none.’ And fearing lest the tutor should think he was using a stratagem for closing his mouth, so unusual was such reading, he replied without hesitation that he had been reading Paley. ‘My tutor’s rejoinder I have never forgotten: “Ah! an excellent author; excellent for his matter: only you must be on your guard as to his style; he is very vicious *there*.” Such was the colloquy; we bowed, parted, and never more (I apprehend) exchanged one word.’ Now De Quincey was convinced that as for matter, Paley was futile; as for style, he



was notable. 'This first interchange of thought upon a topic of literature did not tend to slacken my previous disposition to retreat into solitude; a solitude, however, which at no time was tainted with either moroseness or the pride of a cynic.' <sup>10</sup>

### III

At this time Thomas was 'immersed in metaphysics'; 'metaphysics and psychology' were his 'absorbing pursuit'; and 'moral Philosophy.' It was this philosophical interest which drew him to the study of German,<sup>11</sup> of which, until he went to Oxford, he had read nothing. He was at first fascinated by the riches which he expected to find in it. German 'seemed, in those days, an El Dorado as true and undeceiving as it was evidently inexhaustible. And the central object of this interminable wilderness of what then seemed perishable bloom and verdure — the very tree of knowledge in the midst of this Eden — was the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant.' But if, as he goes on to tell us, 'six weeks' study was sufficient to close my hope in that quarter for ever,' he still pursued German philosophy. It may be that in 1805 he found Kant merely 'a disenchanter, and a disenchanter the most profound,' so that De Quincey became for ten years thereafter 'tinged with cynical distrust towards men in certain aspects.' He found Kant at odds with the revealed religion of the Established Church of England, and De Quincey was a staunch churchman in feeling if not in practice. Yet we may be certain that there was awakening in him no passionate struggle due to shattered faith, even if certain doubts were born which, in addition to other woes, occasionally helped to darken his spirits. With him, traditional Christianity was sure to win. Yet the fascination of Kant endured. For the better part of his life he returned again and again to the exposition and to the refutation of Kant, even if he seems never to have become a learned and profound master of the Kantian philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, II, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *Works*, II, 81 ff. The simple elements of the language and its pronunciation he 'purchased with a very few guineas from my young Dresden tutor [presumably Schwartzburg], who was most anxious to extend his assistance, but this I would not hear of; and in the spirit of fierce (perhaps foolish) independence . . . I did all the rest for myself.'

But whatever his attitude towards German metaphysics in his college days, he was among the earliest of English scholars to study the new philosophy at all; and for an Oxford undergraduate to be concerned with it was a rare phenomenon. In this interest he was almost alone.

Philosophy did not fill all his Oxford time. There was literature. Greek he read daily, yet with qualified admiration. He did not belong to the party who 'disparage the classical writers,' he assures us. 'The Greek drama I loved and revered. . . . I was not that indiscriminate admirer of Greek and Roman literature which those too generally are who admire it at all. This protesting spirit against a false and blind idolatry was with me, at that time, a matter of enthusiasm — almost of bigotry. I was a bigot against bigots.' He was not afraid to stand alone; and his judgments were drawn from knowledge, not ignorance. He could move through all 'the obstacles and resistances of a Greek book with the same celerity and ease as through those of the French and Latin.' Curiously enough, however, he tells us that as the difficulties grew less and fewer, he lost the stimulus to read. Actually, it was his growing enthusiasm for English literature which swallowed up his enthusiasm for Greek.<sup>12</sup>

And here, in this intense love for English literature, he tells us, 'was another not less powerful, and not less unusual' reason for his search for solitude in morbid excess — an intense love for English literature not only of the past, but even more of the present. At Oxford, where English literature was hardly considered worthy of study or of thought, he was led, more completely than the facts might seem to warrant, as he himself later admits, to *expect* a solitude of interest. 'He could not even bring himself to mention [Wordsworth's] name in Oxford, for fear of having to encounter ridiculous observations or jeering abuse of his favourite. . . . Of this he felt himself so impatient that he forbore even to speak upon the subject.'<sup>13</sup>

This love of English literature was no new thing. Already at fifteen he had made himself familiar with the great English

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, II, 62, 72, etc.

<sup>13</sup> *Conversations with Woodhouse*, ed. Garnett, p. 191.

poets. At about sixteen, his interest in the story of Chatterton had carried him over the whole ground of the Rowley controversy; and that controversy, by a necessary consequence, had so familiarized him with 'Black Letter' that he had begun to find an unaffected pleasure in the ancient Metrical Romances; and in Chaucer, though acquainted as yet with only part of his works, he had perceived and profoundly felt those divine qualities which even towards the middle of the nineteenth century were so languidly acknowledged. With Pope and his age he had a slender acquaintance, and what he had was a 'reflex knowledge' acquired at second-hand through Warton's *Essay on Pope*, Boswell's *Johnson*, Mathias's *Pursuits of Literature*,<sup>14</sup> etc. And to quote from the letter to Wordsworth on 6 August 1803 — 'From my youth up I have revered [the elder poets]: Spenser — Shakespeare — Milton — Thomson (partially) — and Collins were the companions of my childhood: I well remember that it was Milton who first waked me to a sense of poetry, and I think there were only two names that I honor above his; but it would be hypocrisy in me to say even his works are "so twisted with my heart-strings" as the *Lyrical Ballads*.' <sup>15</sup>

His real passion was for the new poetry. Before he entered Oxford he was in correspondence with Wordsworth, spurred on by the admiration to which he had given expression in the *Diary* of 1803. He admired Coleridge hardly less. He delighted in Southey. At Christmas time, 1803, he had discovered Charles Lamb, had bought a copy of *John Woodvil*; <sup>16</sup> and on the same morning he had also discovered Landor and bought a copy of *Gebir*; and the splendour of the descriptions in the episode of the marriage of the sea-nymph with Tamor had astonished him. He humorously remarks that he had the prospect of congregating a library which no man had read but himself. If he prided himself on being the only admirer of these new figures in his early Oxford days, he was essentially right and justifiably proud of his recognition of them.

Of other literatures he knew relatively little. He spoke with disparagement of French poetry and evidently ignored French literature at large. One may doubt whether he ever

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, II, 58.<sup>15</sup> GW. MSS.<sup>16</sup> *Works*, III, 35.

knew much of it. It never appealed to him; it offered little of that high imagination which he was wont to emphasize so strongly and which was the source of his enthusiasm for English poetry. Of German literature apart from philosophy, he certainly in his college days knew next to nothing. Of Italian literature he was equally ignorant. Yet for so young a man he had read much; and he had a memory which held with astonishing accuracy whatever interested him. 'Rarely do things perish from my memory that are worth remembering,' he wrote in 1845. 'Hence it happens that passages in Latin or English poets, which I never could have read but once (and *that* thirty years ago), often begin to blossom anew when I am lying awake, unable to sleep. I have become a distinguished compositor in the darkness: and with my aerial composing-stick, sometimes I "set up" half a page of verses, that would be found wholly correct if collated with the volume that I never had in my hand but once.'<sup>17</sup>

His erudition and ability did not escape all notice at Worcester. 'Upon some occasion,' it is reported, 'it was necessary that a declamation should be written and delivered in Latin by some one of his college, and it fell to him to do it. He accordingly composed and delivered the oration, and as he had written it with some care, and was a tolerable master of the language, it excited considerable attention. These things were generally passed without much notice; but he could perceive by the interest which was taken while he was declaiming and by the buzzing and whispering, that it was much better than was expected, and that it had caused some sensation in the auditors. Immediately many persons high in the University came up, shook him by the hand, and congratulated him. . . . Soon after this he found himself much noticed by the head of the college and several of the students; he received invitations and soon discovered that *all* the University men were not of the same description as those with whom he had at first associated. His tutor also paid much attention to him and excited him to try for honours. . . . The declamation he gave at Oxford was framed more after the style of Caesar in his "Commentaries" than after that of

<sup>17</sup> *Confessions, Sequel* (Boston 1851), p. 192.

Cicero. It was studiously clear, simple and short; and it was probably the novelty of avoiding all floridness in the composition that caused it to excite so much notice.' <sup>18</sup>

## IV

DE QUINCEY was restless during his college years. He wrote to Wordsworth in March 1804 that he would spend no more of his time at Oxford than was necessary.<sup>19</sup> In 1807 he wrote to his mother that he was planning to change his college, although, in fact, he never did so.<sup>20</sup> Twice he changed his rooms in Worcester. He did not always wait for vacations to go to London and Bristol; even to the Lakes. And his vacations were spent hither and yon — in Everton, in Westmorland, Bristol, Clifton, and London; he walked great distances.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Garnett, p. 227; 233. By chance there remains a Latin theme which is printed by Hogg in *Thomas De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 104, which may be the particular declamation referred to. The fact of its extreme brevity would seem to suggest that such is not the case. But it is worth citing for its own sake. The motto is '*Non id quod magnum est, pulchrum est; sed quod pulchrum, magnum.*' The desire to overcome the greatest obstacles which impede adventurous undertakings,'—I quote Dr. Garnett's translation — 'and the resolution overcoming them by one's unaided efforts are the property of nothing less than greatness: for the timid weakness of an inferior mind recoils from whatever is arduous.' Here is a thought which, one feels, was somewhat dear to him. Such independence and resolution may be used for nefarious ends; but while now and then a nefarious act may have the marks of greatness, 'there are no manifestly fine actions that are not at the same time good.' Compare this idealism with the sentence from the *Diary*: — 'If I were the means of implanting but one germ of greatness in the mind of a fellow being — if by any book of mine, I could sow one seed of nobleness — one real principle of real goodness — if, in this wide world, I could raise one being to the high purposes of existence, I should at the day of judgment, boldly fling my book into the devil's face.' *Diary*, p. 189.

<sup>19</sup> GW. MSS. 31 March 1804.

<sup>20</sup> *Memls.*, I, 113.

<sup>21</sup> In March 1804, he was living for a time at Littlemoor, near Oxford. (GW. MSS. Letter to W.W., March 31.) He spent the summer with his mother who had taken a house at Hinkley. (*Memls.*, I, 227.) He was in London during that spring or autumn. (*Works*, III, 379.) Most of the summer of 1805 he spent in Everton and walked into the Lake Country as far as Coniston. (Page, I, 107.) He returned to Everton in April 1806; (GW. MSS. Letter to W.W., April 6.) and again for the following summer. (*Memls.*, I, 114.) Again he walked into Westmorland, getting as far as Hammarscar across the lake from Grasmere. (*Works*, II, 231-4.) On 29 December 1806 he was in London; (*Memls.*, I, 111.); and he was still there on 10 January 1807. (*Memls.*, I, 113.) He was back in London on May 18. (*Memls.*, I, 240.) From August to October he was in Everton. (BS. MSS.) Thence he went to Clifton, and accompanied Mrs. Coleridge and her children to Grasmere, arriving on 4 November 1807. (Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson,

His travels at home, however, did not satisfy his longing for change. He wanted to go to Germany because of the fascination of German metaphysics; and one of his few satisfactions at being at Oxford was that the name of having been at the university would be an introduction abroad as a scholar.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, nothing came of his desire, and actually he never set foot on the continent. But an even more striking scheme was dreamed of in his undergraduate days. When the new transcendental philosophy was awakening in him the hope of many and great discoveries, spreading before him prospects of great unexplored spiritual universes, he planned to escape into the unbroken solitudes of America for a life of philosophic devotion. 'My purpose then,' he wrote in 1836, 'was to have retired, after a few years spent in Oxford, to the woods of Lower Canada. I had even marked out the situation for a cottage and a considerable library, about seventeen miles from Quebec. I planned nothing so ambitious as a scheme of *Pantisocracy*. My object was simply profound solitude, such as cannot now be had in any part of Great Britain — with two accessory advantages, also peculiar to countries situated in the circumstances and under the climate of Canada: viz. the exalting presence in an under-consciousness of forests endless and silent, the everlasting sense of living amongst forms so ennobling and impressive, together with the pleasure attached to natural agencies, such as frost, more powerfully manifested than in English latitudes, and for a much longer period.' But the lure of German transcendentalism quickly lost its first magic; and no sooner had he dismissed his German philosophy than he 'relaxed a little that spirit of German abstraction which had prompted it.'<sup>23</sup>

Brit. Mus. MSS.) He was in Oxford on 16 November. In January 1808 he was in London (*Memls.*, I, 131 and 138), and stayed on into February. He returned there in June for some months. (Japp, p. 105.) In October he was in Everton (*Memls.*, I, 277), for what proved to be his last visit. In November he was in Grasmere, living with the Wordsworths.

<sup>22</sup> Garnett, p. 228.

<sup>23</sup> *Works*, II, 108 f.

## V

THERE were other causes for his restlessness and aloofness, namely, ill-health and family troubles. In a letter to Wordsworth<sup>24</sup> of 6 April 1806, he wrote:

'Through the greater part of this interval I have been struggling with an unconfirmed pulmonary consumption which I inherit and which the sedentariness of a college life greatly aided: in their early state my symptoms might easily have been corrected; but the neglect with which I treated them at first from ignorance of their nature and a fever which flung me back after I had made some progress in recovery . . . have made my reestablishment a work of time and difficulty; — But my great affliction was the loss of my brother — a boy of great promise who, in disdain of the tyranny exercised over him at school, went to sea at a time when I was incapable of giving him any assistance or advice: this has grown heavier and heavier as the chance of my hearing any tidings of him have diminished. In losing him I lost a future friend; for, besides what we had of alliance in our minds, we had passed so much of our childhood together (though latterly we had generally been separated) that we had between us common remembrances of early life. . . . This indeed has been my primal affliction through life and especially through my college life that I have lived under a perpetual sense of desertion and have felt, on any demand which my situation made for a service higher than mere youthful generosity could prompt, that I was walking alone in the world: in sickness I felt this severely; for then, from the exhaustion and wasting which waits upon the hectic fever, my mind lost its energy so much that it was passive to whatever noxious influence I fell under for the time: and so by turns it was half palsied by total solitude or disentranced from its native mood by heartless society.

'These things have shed blight upon my mind and have made the two last years of my life so complete a blank in the account of happiness that I know not whether there be one hour in that whole time which I would willingly recall; I have had intervals of bodily health but never any respite from sick-

<sup>24</sup> This letter reopens a correspondence which had lapsed for two years. The latest letter which he had received from Wordsworth had been dated on 19 March 1804; De Quincey had replied to it on March 31 of the same year. This letter of two years later opens with an elaborate apology for his long silence and continues to give a history of the conditions which had kept him from writing.

For the four letters preserved from De Quincey to Wordsworth, 1803-7, see H. A. Eaton, "De Quincey: Letters to Wordsworth before their Meeting." *ELH*, March 1936.

ness of the mind; for books, which might in part have supplied the place of all other pleasures, my small income diminished by the expenses of illness etc. and sometimes my situation would not permit me to procure in any tolerable quantity.' <sup>25</sup>

His illness is described in the *Confessions*: — 'At the commencement of my opium career, I had myself been pronounced repeatedly a martyr elect to pulmonary consumption'; and while the doctors — the physicians of Bristol Hot Wells and Clifton — declared he might recover, 'yet without something like a miracle in my favour, I was instructed to regard myself as a condemned subject. . . . The hectic colours of the face, the nocturnal perspirations, the growing embarrassment of the respiration, and other expressions of gathering feebleness under any attempts at taking exercise — all these symptoms were steadily accumulating. . . .' <sup>26</sup> At the moment of writing to Wordsworth, however, in the letter just quoted, he added that he was for the nonce completely restored to health, presumably as the result of taking opium which he had already begun to consume.

As for the worries about his brother Richard, the fascinating and erratic 'Pink,' that is a story in itself and is told with considerable detail in his essay on *My Brother Pink*. The facts necessary for our purpose are few. Probably in 1803, Richard, whose schooling had been as unfortunately bungled by parent and guardians as that of Thomas himself, was beaten by his school-master, ran away to Liverpool, was recovered, and was forced to return to school. Again he was flogged; and again the boy, who was four years younger than Thomas — at this time, therefore, about fourteen — ran away, eluded his pursuers and friends, and sailed as cabin-boy on a privateer. Upon his return to England, unknown to his family, he transferred in March 1804 to a ship bound for the south seas on a voyage of two years. There he was captured by pirates, and his life was saved only because he had learned the use of the chronometer; and for months he was perforce one of the pirate

<sup>25</sup> GW. MSS. This was written before he came into his patrimony on 15 August 1806.

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, III, 424. In this passage, by slip of memory, he post-dates this state of phthisis as occurring in his twenty-second and twenty-fourth years. The letter to Wordsworth fixes it in his twentieth and twenty-first years.



gang. He escaped; in some way he was present at the storming of Monte Video by the British in 1806, and as a result of bravery and luck was taken aboard the commander's vessel as midshipman. He was transferred within the next two years from ship to ship and was commended for his services; was present later at the battle of Copenhagen; was captured by the Danes and held prisoner for eighteen months; and was at last freed and found his way back to England for a while, still dodging his family or holding but the briefest communication with them. He finally died at the age of twenty-five or twenty-six, about 1815. His sudden disappearances, the inadequate and alarming news of him which from time to time reached Thomas or his mother, the long silences, all these kept anxiety alive in family hearts; and Thomas, who was genuinely attached to his younger brother, may well have felt depressed and worried about him through these unhappy college days. At the very moment when Thomas was writing this letter of 6 April 1806, to Wordsworth, Richard had left for the south seas unbeknown to his family, and all that they knew of his movements was of the vaguest, pieced together from reports of some shipmen at Portsmouth.<sup>27</sup>

Here, then, is the background necessary to keep in mind as we come to De Quincey's first use of opium. He was avoiding the companionship of his fellow students who were, or whom he felt to be, unsympathetic; he was bound by his narrow allowance to a galling poverty; he was threatened in health by what was declared to be consumption; he was frequently overcome by what he called 'misery,' by 'blank desolation' of spirit; he was saddened by the disappearance of his beloved brother; he was in occasional serious religious doubts resulting from his study of Kant. Then a new suffering developed, neuralgia of the face. It was the autumn of 1804;

<sup>27</sup> *Mems.*, I, 223 ff. Most of this amazing epic of adventure comes, naturally, only from De Quincey; but in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 21 October 1920, G. Scott Duckers published excerpts from the Admiralty Treasurer's Pay Books, Series III, no. 3017, as follows: — 'Name, Quincey, D. Richard: Entry, 21st. June, 1807, R. M. Place of Birth, Lancashire: Age on Entry, 18: Quality, Mid (this is struck out and "ab. 21st. July" written above.) 27th. Nov. 1807 taken prisoner by Danes: 20th. Ap. 1809. Return from prison. Full wages 33.9.4, net 31.17.5. Paid 24th. Ap. 1809.' There is no trace in Sea Officers or Navy Lists for the period in question. Evidently he did not rise to a commission.

he had been a member of Worcester College for ten months and he had gone to London for the first time since his matriculation for a change of scene, and, perhaps, to borrow money from money-lenders and to buy books. Then and there he first tasted opium.

## VI

'From an early age I had been accustomed to wash my head in cold water at least once a day. Being suddenly seized with tooth-ache, I attributed it to some relaxation caused by a casual intermission of that practice, jumped out of bed, plunged my head into a basin of cold water, and with hair thus wetted went to sleep. The next morning, I need hardly say, I awoke with excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face, from which I had hardly any respite for about twenty days. On the twenty-first day I think it was, and on a Sunday, that I went out into the streets; rather to run away, if possible, from my torments, than with any distinct purpose of relief. By accident, I met a college acquaintance, who recommended opium. Opium! dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain! I had heard of it as I had heard of manna or ambrosia, but no further: how unmeaning a sound was opium at that time! what solemn chords does it now strike upon my heart! what heart-breaking vibrations of sad and happy remembrances! Reverting for a moment to these, I feel a mystic importance attached to the minutest circumstances connected with the place and the time, and the man, if man he was, that first laid open for me the Paradise of Opium-eaters. It was a Sunday afternoon, wet and cheerless: and a duller spectacle this earth of ours has not to show than a rainy Sunday in London. My road homewards lay through Oxford-street; and near "the stately Pantheon," as Mr. Wordsworth has obligingly called it, I saw a druggist's shop. The druggist, unconscious minister of celestial pleasures! — as if in sympathy with the rainy Sunday, looked dull and stupid, just as any mortal druggist might be expected to look on a Sunday: and, when I asked for the tincture of opium, he gave it to me as any other man might do: and furthermore, out of my shilling, returned me what seemed to be real copper half-pence, taken out of a real wooden drawer. Nevertheless, in spite of such indications of humanity, he has ever since existed in my mind as the beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself. And it confirms me in this way of considering him, that, when I next came up to London, I sought him near the stately Pantheon, and found him not: and thus to me, who knew not his name (if indeed he had one) he seemed

rather to have vanished from Oxford-street than to have removed in any bodily fashion. . . . Arrived at my lodgings, it may be supposed that I lost not a moment in taking the quantity prescribed. I was necessarily ignorant of the whole art and mystery of opium-taking; and what I took, I took under every disadvantage. But I took it: — and in an hour, oh! heavens! what a revulsion! what an upheaving, from its lowest depths, of the inner spirit! what an apocalypse of the world within me! That my pains had vanished, was now a trifle in my eyes: — this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me — in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea — a *φάρμακον νηπενθές*, for all human woes; here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered: happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waist-coat pocket: portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint bottle: and peace of mind could be sent down in gallons by the mail coach.<sup>28</sup>

Opium relieved his pains; it even more completely relieved his spiritual depression. Unlike the drunkenness of wine, he tells us, opium 'if taken in the proper manner, introduces amongst the mental faculties the most exquisite order, legislation and harmony.' The eater 'feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount — that is, the moral affections in a state of cloudless serenity, and high over all the great light of the majestic intellect.' Far from feeling depression as the result of its use, he feels uplifted. 'For ten years during which I took opium not regularly, but intermittingly' — viz. from 1804 — 'the day succeeding to that on which I allowed myself this luxury was always a day of unusually good spirits.'<sup>29</sup>

The first state of its action always lasted with him, during his novitiate, for upwards of eight hours; for that time it excited and stimulated the system; and he so arranged the hour of taking the drug that its narcotic influence descended upon him at the natural period of sleep; but until the moment came, he was spurred on to activity of mind, and even to activity of body. And he tells of how he passed an opium evening in London during the period of his college residence, in which opium did not move him to seek solitude, much less to seek inactivity. 'I was a hard student,' he adds, 'and at

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, III, 380; Garnett, pp. 73 ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, III, 383 and 387.

severe studies for all the rest of my time; and certainly I had a right occasionally to relaxations as well as other people.'

'The late Duke of [Norfolk] used to say, "Next Friday, by the blessing of Heaven, I purpose to be drunk": and in like manner I used to fix beforehand how often, within a given time, and when, I would commit a debauch of opium. This was seldom more than once in three weeks: for at that time I could not have ventured to call every day (as I did afterwards) for "*a glass of laudanum negus, warm, and without sugar.*" No: as I have said, I seldom drank laudanum, at that time, more than once in three weeks: this was usually on a Tuesday or a Saturday night; my reason for which was this. In those days Grassini sang in the Opera: and her voice was delightful to me beyond all that I had ever heard. I know not what may be the state of the Opera-house now, having never been within its walls for seven or eight years' — he was writing in 1821 — 'but at that time it was by much the most pleasant place of public resort in London for passing an evening. Five shillings admitted one to the gallery, which was subject to far less annoyance than the pit of the theatres: the orchestra was distinguished by its sweet and melodious grandeur from all English orchestras, the composition of which, I confess, is not acceptable to my ear, from the predominance of the clamorous instruments, and the absolute tyranny of the violin. The choruses were divine to hear: and when Grassini appeared in some interlude, as she often did, and poured forth her passionate soul as Andromache at the tomb of Hector, etc. I question whether any Turk, of all that ever entered the paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had. But, indeed, I honour the Barbarians too much by supposing them capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual ones of an Englishman.'<sup>80</sup>

Or, if music did not call him, he used often on Saturday nights, as he tells us,

'after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets and other parts of London, whither the poor resort on a Saturday night for laying out their wages. Many a family party, consisting of a man, his wife, and sometimes one or two of his children, have I listened to, as they stood consulting on their ways and means, or the strength of their exchequer, or the price of household articles. Gradually I became familiar with their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions. . . .

<sup>80</sup> Garnett, pp. 84 f.

Whenever I saw occasion, or could do it without appearing to be intrusive, I joined their parties; and gave my opinion upon the matter in discussion, which, if not always judicious, was always received indulgently. . . Some of these rambles led me to great distances; for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the polestar, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage . . . I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys . . . as must, I conceive, baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney-coachmen.' . . .

' Thus I have shown that opium does not, of necessity, produce inactivity or torpor; but that, on the contrary, it often led me into markets and theatres. Yet, in candour, I will admit that markets and theatres are not the appropriate haunts of the opium-eater, when in the divinest state incident to his enjoyment. In that state, crowds become an oppression to him; music even, too sensual and gross. He naturally seeks solitude and silence, as indispensable conditions of those trances, or profoundest reveries which are the crown and consummation of what opium can do for human nature.'<sup>31</sup>

Once he had begun the use of opium, once he had found the happiness lying at hand in the drug, he continued unblushingly to take it. He saw no ill results—indeed, he found the symptoms of consumption which had been tormenting him disappear, apparently as the result of his indulgence. As yet he had no premonitions that he was fastening upon himself a habit which he could not break. But the opium indulgences furnish a further explanation of his increasing retirement into himself during his last years at Oxford. The practice was not a thing to share with his fellows; it became a secret which, however completely shared with the public in later years, was at the time inviolate. Neither friends, of whom he apparently had few, nor his family, it is safe to say, knew of it. And if, as he tells us, the effects of opium drove him in these early days to activity in mixing with men, it could hardly have made him more sociable with his mates at Worcester. Rather, he was impelled, as in London, to seek out strangers or places where he might, as at the opera, have opportunities for exalted emotions or intellectual ecstasies *among* men rather than *with* them.

<sup>31</sup> Garnett, p. 89 f.

Here at Oxford, De Quincey places specifically some of the dreams which he wrote down in his *Suspiria*. Now first began the crowding in of his past experiences, conscious and sub-conscious, to form the gorgeous and terrible pictures of his sleeping hours. 'The idealising tendency existed in the dream theatre of my childhood,' he writes; 'but the preternatural strength of its action and colouring was first developed after the confluence of the *two causes*' — namely the predisposition to dreaming and opium. And he goes on to tell of the recurrence in dream of the incidents of his sister's death with which he opened the *Suspiria*. Then he sets down those memories repeated in his sleep. 'Once again, after twelve years' interval, the nursery of my childhood expanded before me. . . Once again the nurse, but now dilated to colossal proportions . . . smote me senseless to the ground. . . . Dream formed itself mysteriously within dream; within these Oxford dreams remoulded itself continually the trance in my sister's chamber. . . And now in Oxford all was bound up into unity; the first state and the last were melted into each other as in some sunny glorifying haze. For high above my own station hovered a gleaming host of heavenly beings, surrounding the pillows of the dying children.'

And there were Levana, and Our Ladies of Sorrow, those three mysterious and terrible figures — Mater Lachrymarum, Mater Suspiriorum, and most terrible of all, Mater Tenebrarum; Misery, 'the defier of God, . . . the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides' — she who was to be for him, as he tells us, a torment; who was commissioned to see that her sceptre lay heavy on his head; to banish from him the frailties of hope, to scorch the fountain of tears, to curse him as only *she* could curse. Thus under all his external life from then on, he was to be haunted and tortured by misery — a fact to remember through the long succeeding years when we have but faint or no insight into his heart and mind obscured by trivial details of daily struggle and living.

Whether other dreams which he recalls come from Oxford years, I do not know. But there *were* other dreams, a world of unimaginable strangeness and supernatural reality. They offered experiences of exaltation and sorrow which must have

made the narrow world of his daily college life and ordinary human associations seem the unreality.

## VII

OPIUM, however, did not slacken his studious activities. After the success of his Latin declamation he was urged to try for honours. At the time he refused. In fact, from what he saw of the examinations at Oxford, he looked upon them as so much a farce, and so unfair a standard to try a person's general ability and proficiency that he had determined not to attempt to gain distinction or even to take a degree, which to his mind could convey no honour worth seeking. But the importunities of his friend Millar and of his tutor Jones caused him to consent at last. Yet there was another reason. It had just been decreed that the Greek examination should be given in Greek, and this fact fired him with enthusiasm; he felt confident of going through the examination triumphantly.<sup>32</sup>

It is from letters to Dorothy Wordsworth that we get the story of his strenuous preparations for the ordeal. On 25 March 1808 he wrote:

'On my journey to this place [Oxford] from Grasmere, I left Manchester for Birmingham soon after midnight in a very rapid mail; and in two hours after reaching Birmingham came on to Oxford in another: the feverishness which followed went off (as usual) after sleeping; but either that or the uneasy doze in which I had passed the night between Manchester and Birmingham left behind a strange affection in my head almost like lethargy so that I frequently fell asleep in the middle of the day: this gradually abated: and it was during this abatement (which I then hoped was leading regularly on to a close) that I wrote last: but in a few days after it finally settled into the complaint which I had before my visit to Grasmere — called, I believe, a determination of blood to the head: after getting through the term as well as I could, I went up to London; and there paying strict attention to the advice of a very able surgeon — namely, drinking no wine and never bending my head downwards, I recovered very soon so far as to be able to read very well by holding the book up in my hand; but still, fearing to do anything which might fling me back (having so much occasion for sanity of head at this particular time), I never ventured to write anything but a letter of business containing

<sup>32</sup> Garnett, pp. 227-8.

only a few lines. I came down to College last Saturday fortnight [i.e. March 5] almost entirely recovered; and found your letter (as Mr. Wordsworth had given me reason to hope) lying here: ever since then however until within a day or two (either from having walked part of the way from London, frequently without my hat, or from sleeping with my head too low) I have been wholly incapacitated from writing by a return of my complaint, strengthened by an inability to sleep until about morning, when mere exhaustion forces me into sleep: this attack would no doubt have yielded sooner to the remedies prescribed to me in London, but that the anxiety which I could not subdue as to the public examination for a degree urged me perpetually to attempt reading, though I found I could read to no purpose: so that, finding the whole University on tiptoe for the approaching prizefighting [i.e. the examination] and myself in a state of palsy as to any power of exertion, I felt very much as in dreams which I recollect where I have been chased by a lion and spell-bound from even attempting to escape. Within these two days however I have recovered almost entirely, and having just received from my mother a reading-stand very ingeniously constructed, I find myself able to read and write even with advantage to my head from the necessity of looking up; so that I should now have no doubt of mastering the quantity of labour if I could reconcile myself a little better to its quality; but for the most part, it consists of learning by heart immense (*systems* they are called, but in reality) collections of unassorted details which, not being dependencies on any common law — so that the law in which they were involved being known the tributary parts, corollaries, illustrations etc. might be elaborated by an extempore process of intellect during the examination — but having almost as slight logical relations as the names of men living in a given street, must be gained by separate acts of memory. And even that part of the labour which would of itself be pleasant becomes painful from the necessity of hurrying through it; as with respect to reading the Greek tragedies; for, having now to do before about the 10th. of May what I doubted about being able to do between December and that day, I have been obliged in my distribution of labour for the next six weeks to crowd the reading of all the 33 tragedies into one week; so that I must pass with such speed from grief to grief that they are to me in prospect like the *woes* in the Revelations, only that between those woes I remember some breathing-space is allowed which mine will hardly admit of. — The motives to all this labour are besides inadequate; for the differences between success and non-success are the being placarded on all the college walls as the *Illustrious* Mr. A. B. C., or 2ndly. as the *Praiseworthy* Mr.



A. B. C., or 3rdly. the not being placarded at all: and also the gratifying or displeasing one's own college: each of which motives is powerful enough with me, whilst I am living with University men, to make me wish to be *Illustrious* at the beginning of May next — but not powerful enough to transfer pleasure to the means of achieving that end.'

And again on May 8: — 'I am now reading every day for 18 hours out of the 24 — and never at all go to bed, but only fall asleep on a sofa when I can keep awake no longer. I am afraid you will think this very foolish; but having been treated with great kindness by my college, I cannot endure to disappoint their expectations if the time I have remaining will enable me to do what I have undertaken.' He added, 'The examinations are already begun; and a great many criminals are already *turned off*; but, having prevailed on the proctor to insert my name as a *Q.* in the calendar, I am respited until about next Friday week.' — i.e. May 13.<sup>83</sup>

'The Opium Eater underwent a very long examination, [i.e. more than two hours in length]. He was first put to translate Latin into English, and afterwards to render English at sight into Latin. And he could perceive from the whispers, the silence and various other indications, that he was considered a proficient, and was likely to pass a splendid examination.'<sup>84</sup> Dr. Cotton, later Provost of Worcester, gives a fragment of traditional gossip: — 'On the evening of that day Mr. Goodenough of Christchurch, who was one of the examiners, went down to a gentleman, then resident at Worcester College, and well acquainted with De Quincey, and said

<sup>83</sup> GW. MSS. In Woodhouse's report of conversations is the following passage: — 'About a week before it [the examination] was to take place the order for giving the answers in the Greek examinations in that language was rescinded and it was directed that they should be given in English. This completely destroyed all stimulus in the Opium Eater's mind; he no longer cared to go through an examination which would only show that he in common with others had acquired knowledge of a particular description, but would not leave him room to show his general proficiency. He thought of declining to go up, and it was only the earnest wishes of his friend Millar and his tutor that induced him so to do. He entertained a contempt for the general acquirements of his examiners, for the sort of examination to be gone through, and especially for that trickery in the examiners of trying students in some particularly difficult passages or points in which they would make themselves perfectly at home, without any attempt to ascertain the real ability of the person under examination in the language.' (Garnett, p. 229.) There is nothing of this reaction in the letter just quoted. Perhaps the change in method was declared after it had been written; perhaps, in memory he 'rationalized' his situation *ex post facto*.

<sup>84</sup> Garnett, p. 231.

to him, "You have sent us to-day the cleverest man I ever met with; if his *viva voce* examination to-morrow correspond with what he has done in writing, he will carry everything before him." To this his friend made answer that he feared De Quincey's *viva voce* would be comparatively imperfect, even if he presented himself for examination, which he rather doubted.<sup>35</sup> The friend evidently knew De Quincey, and the prophecy was fulfilled. For on the next morning — the first examination was on Saturday, and the second to follow on the Monday — 'On the Sunday morning, he left Oxford. When the time came for the examination he was *non inventus*.' He thus ended his college career in May 1808.<sup>36</sup>

Did he fear failure or a poor showing, with the consequent wound to his pride? Did the first examination confirm him in his feeling that the examiners were unfair? Or, as one is tempted to suggest, did he use opium so unwisely that after the first test to which he had keyed himself there followed a depression which unfitted him to face the second? No one can ever know; but the departure from Oxford was entirely in line with other of his sudden moves — his elopement from Manchester, his departure from Wales to London. Motives long dormant, or seething without expression, suddenly stirred him to action. I am inclined to waive aside the obvious explanation, and to think that the feeling of general futility in the whole academic business and of the lack of advantage to himself, even if he attained the dignity of *Illustrious*, got the upper hand. His was a nature of much reason and little judgment; of long endurance and unexpected action.

<sup>35</sup> James Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Garnett, p. 232. He seems to have had some lingering thought of returning to Oxford to get his degree. At least his sister Mary wrote to him on June 30 [presumably 1810] (*Memls.*, II, 73) 'I hope you are going to take a degree at Oxford. Does not your heart dance at the idea of adding B.A. or M.A. to your name?' His name was finally removed from the books of Worcester College on 15 December 1810. (Hogg, p. 108.)

CHAPTER VIII  
THE FIRST MEETINGS WITH LAMB,  
COLERIDGE, AND WORDSWORTH

1805-1807

I

ALREADY while an undergraduate at Oxford, De Quincey had begun to make literary acquaintances which, springing from his passionate enthusiasm for the new poetry, were to be among the most important influences in his life, giving him on the one side solid personal satisfactions, and on the other many themes for brilliant reminiscence. 'Amongst the earliest literary acquaintances I made,' he tells us, 'was that with the inimitable Charles Lamb.'<sup>1</sup> Late in 1804 or early in 1805, he had obtained from a friend a letter of introduction. All he knew of Lamb's work at the time was *John Woodvil*; so that what he hoped from the introduction was not so much the joy of meeting a man of letters whom he admired, as the thrill of knowing a friend of Coleridge, who at the time was in Malta. Promptly De Quincey carried his letter to India House, dislodged Lamb from his high stool, as the *Recollections of Charles Lamb* so delightfully records, and was invited to drink tea in the Temple, where Lamb was living. Thus the acquaintance was begun, but not too happily.

That evening De Quincey turned the conversation early upon Coleridge. 'And many of my questions were answered satisfactorily, because seriously, by Miss Lamb. But Lamb took a pleasure in baffling me or in throwing ridicule upon the subject.'<sup>2</sup> The young De Quincey was shocked at such levity; and when the talk narrowed to *The Ancient Mariner*, and Lamb quoted

'The many men so beautiful  
And they all dead did lie!'

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, III, 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, III, 38 ff.

and added 'So beautiful, indeed! Beautiful! Just think of such a gang of Wapping vagabonds, all covered with pitch, and chewing tobacco: and the old gentleman himself — what do you call him? — the bright-eyed fellow?', De Quincey raised his hands to both ears; and without stopping to think or to apologize, tried to shut out all further impiety of this traitor worse than an enemy.<sup>3</sup> Lamb was puzzling and disconcerting; and in spite of his attempts to placate the youth, De Quincey did not trouble him with his calls again for some years.

In the interval between 1808 and 1814, De Quincey saw Lamb with some frequency in Coleridge's rooms and came to appreciate him better — to appreciate him, as he tells us, 'almost at his full value.' Between 1821 and 1823 he felt that he came to know Lamb thoroughly; especially that more sympathetic side of Lamb, his kindness, his hospitality, his delicacy of feeling, at a time when De Quincey himself was in most embarrassed pecuniary circumstances and in deep despondency. Never was there any close personal intimacy between them; although perhaps in his writings with their memories and interpretations De Quincey gives the impression of knowing Lamb better than was really the case.

## II

A FAR more important acquaintance was made during the summer of 1807, when De Quincey met Coleridge himself. He had early read *The Ancient Mariner* and recognized '“the ray of a new morning” and an absolute revelation of untrodden worlds teeming with power and beauty unsuspected amongst men.'<sup>4</sup> Then came the search for other works. 'I had read . . . as respects Mr. Coleridge, the Allegory which he contributed to Mr. Southey's *Joan of Arc*. I had read his fine Ode entitled *France*, his *Ode to the Duchess of Devonshire*, and various other contributions, more or less interesting, to the two volumes of the *Anthology* published at Bristol about 1799-1800 by Mr. Southey; and, finally, I had of course, read the small volume of poems published under his own name.'<sup>5</sup> 'Meantime,' wrote De Quincey, 'it had

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, III, 43 ff.<sup>4</sup> *Works*, II, 138 ff.<sup>5</sup> *Works*, II, 139.

crowned the interest which to me invested his name, that about the year 1804 or 1805 <sup>6</sup> I had been informed by a gentleman from the English Lakes, who knew him as a neighbour, that he had for some time applied his whole mind to metaphysics and psychology — which happened to be my own absorbing pursuit.' <sup>7</sup> He heard that Coleridge was in Malta. He began to inquire about the best route to Malta. At last in 1807, he heard that Coleridge was in England and not far from Bristol Hot Wells where De Quincey was staying at the time. The informant in this case was Joseph Cottle, publisher and friend of the poet; and from him De Quincey procured a letter of introduction <sup>8</sup> to Thomas Poole of Nether Stowey. Coleridge had been visiting there, but had gone away for a little when De Quincey reached Poole's house. Since, however, he was momentarily expected back, Poole kept the young man with him for two or three days. Then it was discovered that Coleridge was staying with a Mr. Chubb at Bridgewater, and De Quincey promptly went thither to spend one of the most exciting days of his life.

De Quincey's account of that first meeting is famous. At Bridgewater, standing beneath a gateway, stood Coleridge in a muse. Startled by De Quincey's addressing him, he awoke to reality with difficulty, invited the young man to his host's house, ordered refreshments for him, and invited him to dinner that same night. Then, Coleridge, 'like some great river, the Orellana, or the St Lawrence, that, having been checked and fretted by rocks or thwarting islands, suddenly recovers its volume of waters and its mighty music, swept at once, as if returning to his natural business, into a continuous strain of eloquent dissertation, certainly the most novel, the most finely illustrated, and traversing the most spacious fields of thought by transitions the most just and logical, that it was possible to conceive.' <sup>9</sup> De Quincey had brought an offering to him, a scarce Latin pamphlet *De Ideis* written by Hartley

<sup>6</sup> It was actually 1 June 1803, as the *Diary* of 1803 tells us, 'Dr. Bree surprises me by telling me that Coleridge intends to astonish the world with a Metaphysical work, on which he intends to found his fame.' (*Diary*, p. 191.)

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, II, 140.

<sup>8</sup> Preserved in the British Museum; dated 26 July 1807. MSS. Add. 35, 344.

<sup>9</sup> *Works*, II, 152.

about 1746; and the great Monologue, starting thus with Hartley and with Coleridge's own earlier faith, continued for about three hours, involving an apology for his divagations and his present beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

In the midst of this conversation, if so it may be called, a lady entered. 'Coleridge paused upon her entrance; his features, however, announced no particular complacency, and did not relax into a smile. In a frigid tone he said, whilst turning to me, "Mrs. Coleridge"; in some slight way he then presented her to me; I bowed; and the lady almost immediately retired.' A few months later, De Quincey was to conduct Mrs. Coleridge and her children to the Lakes, and so at last to accomplish his meeting with Wordsworth.

On that same night, according to De Quincey's narrative, Coleridge with a profound expression of cheerless melancholy<sup>11</sup> entered into 'a spontaneous explanation of this unhappy overclouding of his life [by opium] on occasion of my saying accidentally that a toothache had obliged me to take a few drops of laudanum. At what time or on what motive he had commenced the use of opium, he did not say; but the peculiar emphasis of horror with which he warned me against forming a habit of the same kind impressed upon my mind a feeling that he never hoped to liberate himself from the bondage.' It has been doubted whether any such conversation took place at a first meeting, between strangers.<sup>12</sup> But whatever the facts, the recognition between them, soon inevitable, of the common indulgence was to serve De Quincey all his life as a theme for thought and writing, and in curious ways was always to give him a claim to superiority in his own wiser use of the drug, whether justified in the event or not. At this time, 1807, Coleridge was certainly far more deeply involved than De Quincey and was less the master of his habit.

'About ten at night I took leave of him,' wrote De Quincey; 'and, feeling that I could not easily go to sleep after the excitement of the day, and fresh from the sad spectacle of powers so majestic already besieged by decay, I determined to return to Bristol through the coolness of the night.' And on the

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, II, 157.

<sup>11</sup> *Works*, II, 162.

<sup>12</sup> *Coleridge's Poetical Works* ed. Campbell, (Macmillan), p. lxxiv.

way, the night, the silence — all conspired to throw back his thoughts upon that extraordinary man whom he had just left. De Quincey's admiration was unbounded; his pity was stirred. Here was a regal mind overthrown, or threatened with overthrow, not by a visitation of Providence, but by the treachery of its own will, and by the conspiracy, as it were, of himself against himself! Was it possible that this ruin had been caused or hurried forward by the dismal degradations of pecuniary difficulties? That was 'worth inquiring.'<sup>13</sup> He did inquire of Joseph Cottle; and shortly afterwards he undertook through Cottle to make to Coleridge a present of money from the patrimony which had come into his possession upon his twenty-first birthday, in August of the preceding year.<sup>14</sup>

Cottle at once wrote to Coleridge. The donor, he said, 'is a man of so much delicacy, that (from an apprehension that you would be more likely to accept this sum from me rather than from a stranger) he wished this sum to come directly from *me*. To this, however, I decidedly objected; he then stipulated with me that his name should be concealed.'<sup>15</sup> Coleridge was much moved by the offer, and after some consideration wrote to Cottle of his willingness to accept. 'If you know that my unknown benefactor is in such circumstances that, in doing what he offers to do, he transgresses no duty of morals or of prudence, and does not do that from feelings which after-reflection might perhaps discountenance, I shall gratefully accept it as an unconditional loan which I trust I shall be able to restore at the close of two years. This, however, I shall be able to know at the expiration of one year, and shall then beg to know the name of my benefactor, which I should then only feel delight in knowing, when I could present to him some substantial proof that I have employed the tranquillity of mind which his kindness has enabled me to enjoy in sincere desires to benefit my fellow men.'<sup>16</sup> As a result of this acceptance by Coleridge, De

<sup>13</sup> *Works*, II, 163.

<sup>14</sup> The account of the gift which we get from De Quincey's article on Coleridge in 1834 is brief and reticent. The time within which the gift was conceived and made is there stated as a fortnight after the visit to Bridge-water; but the facts are somewhat different.

<sup>15</sup> *Memls.*, I, 128.

<sup>16</sup> *Page*, I, 133.

Quincey tried to make the gift five hundred pounds; but Cottle advised against it. 'A spirit of equity compels me to recommend you in the first instance to present Mr. Coleridge with a smaller sum, which, if you see right, you can at any time augment.' So the original sum of three hundred pounds was determined upon; and Coleridge gave a receipt to Cottle for the money on 12 November 1807.

The anonymity of the gift was formally maintained; but in a letter which Cottle wrote to De Quincey some days after the close of the transaction he says, 'Altho' you restricted me (except under certain circumstances which did not occur) from mentioning your name, and in which I think you did right, yet I am satisfied that Coleridge entertains *no doubt* of the source whence the money was derived. The tenor of my conversation with him respecting you must have been conclusive to a mind much less penetrating than Coleridge's, and in a letter which I afterwards addressed to him, I observed the pleasure it wd. give me to learn that he had an opportunity of introducing Mr. de Quincey into one of the select literary Societies. I also further remarked that I also knew you to be "a noble-minded young man." It wd. not have satisfied my mind to have said less than this, and perhaps it wd. not have been well to have said more. I have taken care that a transaction so honourable to yourself, in all its circumstances, shall not be forgotten' — a prophecy of his final publication of the story in 1837 — 'and by thus judiciously concealing your name you avoid all feeling of direct obligation, and in your future intercourse with Coleridge will preserve more of independence, which, to some minds, is essential to friendship.' <sup>17</sup>

As a spontaneous expression of sincere admiration for a great man whom he found in trouble, physical and financial, the gift can only reflect credit upon De Quincey. He was impetuous and generous; and his admiration of genius was discerning and sincere to the point, perhaps, of reckless sacrifice. He sought no credit for it; the anxiety he showed to have the gift made anonymously or to have Cottle make it in his own name, shows that. The fact that Cottle practically re-



vealed his identity to Coleridge was none of his doing. His pleasure came from his own satisfaction at having helped his hero.

### III

DE QUINCEY lingered on in Clifton into the autumn, although he had planned to begin an expedition through South and North Wales soon after the middle of September.<sup>18</sup> He was walking widely over the surrounding country, and dreaming — losing five hours on one occasion in 'a very remarkable aberration' as he called it. But he was also keeping in close touch with Coleridge or his family. In a letter to his sister on 15 September 1807, is a postscript: — 'Mrs. Coleridge is with her children in Bristol, but Mr. Coleridge still remains at Stowey. Hartley Coleridge dined with me a few days ago; and I gained his special favour, I believe, by taking him — at the risk of our respective necks — through every dell and tangled path of Leighwood. However, Derwent still continues my favourite.'<sup>19</sup> Somewhat later Coleridge himself arrived in Bristol. On calling upon him, De Quincey found that he had been engaged by the Royal Institution to lecture at their Theatre in Albemarle Street in London during the coming winter of 1807-8, and consequently, was embarrassed about the mode of conveying his family to Keswick. Upon this, De Quincey offered his services to escort them in a post-chaise. This offer was cheerfully accepted; and at the latter end of October they set forwards under his care — Mrs. Coleridge with her two sons: Hartley aged nine, Derwent about seven; and her beautiful little daughter Sara about five.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> BS. MSS. Letter to his sister, at Clapham, Surrey, 15 September 1807; from part not given by Page, I, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Page, I, 124.

<sup>20</sup> *Works*, II, 293. This kindly service was what might have been expected. For in the second letter to Wordsworth, on 31 March 1804, he had written anent Coleridge's illness: — 'If he is advised to try Bath waters (which, I believe, are of great benefit in rheumatic complaints) and he has no friends there whose services he would prefer on such an occasion, I hope that I may be permitted to procure lodgings and all other accommodations for him. I can never have engagements here [at Oxford] important enough to detain me from such an office: besides that the distance from Bath to Bristol is so trifling, and the time it would take to execute such a commission so short, that the inconvenience to me, even on a less interesting occasion, would be none at all.' (GW. MSS.) And in 1809 De Quincey was to offer his services to Wordsworth to see his pamphlet of Cintra through the press.

Going by the direct northward route, they reached Liverpool on the third day, where De Quincey put up at a hotel, while the Coleridges stayed with the Misses Koster. Mr. Koster, a rich gold-merchant who had recently left Lisbon to escape the approach of the French troops, called upon De Quincey and invited him to dinner at his house. On that occasion De Quincey met Madame Catalani, 'that marvel of women.' He had heard her repeatedly in opera, but he met her here for the first time, although, as he tells us, not for the last time, at that same house. For about a week, the party stayed in Liverpool; then it moved northwards, spending a night at Lancaster, and at three the next day, 4 November 1807, it reached Ambleside.<sup>21</sup> At four they were at the top of White Moss.

'In ascending this hill, from weariness of moving so slowly, I, with the two Coleridges' — i.e. the two boys — 'had alighted; and as we all chose to refresh ourselves by running down the hill into Grasmere, we had left the chaise behind us, and had even lost the sound of the wheels at times, when all at once we came at an abrupt turn of the road, in sight of a white cottage, with two yew trees breaking the glare of its white walls. A sudden shock seized me on recognising this cottage, of which, in the previous year, I had gained a momentary glimpse from Hammerscar, on the opposite side of the Lake. I paused and felt my old panic returning upon me; but just then, as if to take away all doubt upon the subject, I saw Hartley Coleridge, who had gained upon me considerably, suddenly turn in at the garden gate: that motion to the right at once confirmed me in my belief that here at last we had reached our port; that this little cottage was tenanted by that man whom, of all the men from the beginning of time, I most fervently desired to see; that in less than a minute I should meet Wordsworth face to face.'<sup>22</sup>

The importance of this imminent meeting for De Quincey was truly great. We have already seen how tremendous an admiration he had long cherished for the poet of the *Lyrical Ballads*. We have seen that first letter to Wordsworth from Everton. Other letters which followed were no less perfervid.

<sup>21</sup> Sara Coleridge to Thomas Poole, 28 December 1807 (Brit. Mus. MSS.) confirms sufficiently the details.

<sup>22</sup> *Works*, II, 254.

In return Wordsworth had replied most cordially, more than once inviting Thomas to visit him in Grasmere and signing himself 'Your affectionate friend, William Wordsworth,' or 'Your affectionate William Wordsworth.' Such response on the part of the great man might well have filled De Quincey with joy; but perhaps the very warmth of Wordsworth's expressions of friendliness made the thoughts of actual meeting more alarming.

Thomas had wanted to turn towards the Lakes and Wordsworth, when he ran away from the Manchester Grammar School; but, at the moment of his elopement he had had no reply to his first letter to Wordsworth — a fatal barrier for the time being. Twice he had walked northwards from Liverpool; once as far as Coniston, in the middle of August 1805, once as far as Hammerscar in the summer of 1806; and on both occasions he had turned back without bringing himself to enter the shrine. He was constantly speaking of going to the Lakes; for his sister writing him in September 1806, in ignorance of his actual doings, asked whether he were wandering on the shores of Windermere or of the Mersey (i.e. at Everton);<sup>23</sup> and even in the following summer of 1807, Mary, too, asked in a letter<sup>24</sup> why he did not go to the Lakes. It took the accidental need of an escort for Mrs. Coleridge and her children to carry him within the door of Dove Cottage.<sup>25</sup>

## IV

At last the moment of meeting had come. 'Never before nor since can I reproach myself with having trembled at the approaching presence of any creature that is born of woman, excepting only, for once or twice in my life, woman herself. Now, however, I *did* tremble; and I forgot, what in no other circumstance I could have forgotten, to stop for the coming of the chaise, that I might be ready to hand Mrs. Coleridge out. Had Charlemagne and all his peerage been behind, or

<sup>23</sup> *Memls.*, I, 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 146.

<sup>25</sup> We have two letters from Wordsworth to De Quincey — one of April 25 and one of April 28 1807, (*W. F. L.* I, 300-1) both from London, where Wordsworth was to be for ten days to two weeks longer. Evidently De Quincey answered one at least, for Wordsworth writes, 'I am very happy at the prospect of seeing you. I have been much interested in you.' But De Quincey did not call upon him there.

Caesar and his equipage, or Death on his pale horse, I should have forgotten them at that moment of intense expectation, and of eyes fascinated to what lay before me, or what might in a moment appear.' His habitual coolness in emergencies, his manners, were gone! He went forward. 'I heard a step, a voice, and, like a flash of lightening, I saw the figure emerge of a tallish man, who held out his hand, and saluted me with the most cordial expressions of welcome.' It was Wordsworth who went forth to greet Mrs. Coleridge. 'I, therefore, stunned almost with the actual accomplishment of a catastrophe so long anticipated and so long postponed, mechanically went forward into the house.'<sup>26</sup> There, as everybody knows, were Mrs. Wordsworth and Dorothy. De Quincey's description of the arrival is justly famous, but Dorothy Wordsworth's account for Mrs. Clarkson is briefer.<sup>27</sup> 'I heard a tumult in the house and Mary shouted. I went alarmed, and guess my surprise and joy at seeing Hartley, skipping about the room and his Mother and Derwent and Sara were at the door in a chaise and a Mr. De Quincey, a young Oxonian who long ago addressed a letter to William. . . The Coleridges stayed with us all night and left us after dinner to-day. By lodging two at Peggy Ashburner's we contrived to harbour the whole party, not excepting Mr. De Quincey.'

But to return to De Quincey's own narrative: — 'That night . . . was (it is little, indeed, to say) memorable: it was marked by a change even in the physical condition of my nervous system. Long disappointment — hope for ever baffled (and why should it be less painful because *self*-baffled?) — vexation and self-blame, almost self-contempt, at my own want of courage to face the man whom of all since the Flood I most yearned to behold: — these feelings had impressed upon my nervous sensibilities a character of irritation — agitation — restlessness — eternal self-dissatisfaction — which were gradually gathering into a distinct, well-defined type; that would, but for youth — almighty youth, and the spirit of youth — have shaped itself into some nervous complaint, wearing symptoms *sui generis*. . . . To this result things tended;

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, II, 235.

<sup>27</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. Add. 36,997.

but in one hour, all passed away. It was gone, never to return.' <sup>28</sup>

The evening was spent in talk, in conversation superior by much, in its tone and subject, to any which De Quincey had ever heard before — one exception being made in favour of Coleridge's; but even the talk of Coleridge was less impressive and weighty. De Quincey slept in the best room; and was awakened in the morning 'by a little voice, issuing from a little cottage bed in an opposite corner, soliloquizing in a low tone' — the voice of the eldest Wordsworth child, a boy of three. It was a sort of symbolic adoption by the Wordsworth family which was to be so complete. Miss Wordsworth was preparing breakfast when he issued from his room; and, as De Quincey tells us, he — the son of a merchant who had lived in the midst of luxurious, if not ostentatious, surroundings since his childhood — had never seen so humble a *ménage*, except, of course, in peasant cottages. It was honourable poverty; and the courageous avowal of it, the utter absence of all effort to disguise the simple fact, won his admiration. The day was rainy. De Quincey, Wordsworth, and Dorothy walked up Easedale, and round the lakes of Grasmere and Rydal. On the third day, Wordsworth proposed a journey to Keswick by way of Ullswater, forty-three miles.<sup>29</sup> They started in a strange cart; and sometimes riding, sometimes walking, the whole family, except the children, made their way over Kirkstone Pass to Patterdale where they spent the night, and where Wordsworth read to De Quincey the introduction to the *White Doe of Rylestone*.<sup>30</sup> Next day Wordsworth and De Quincey wandered through the woods of Lowther and on to Penrith, where Wordsworth had business which kept him over the succeeding day; and De Quincey walked alone over the seventeen miles to Keswick, and was hospitably received by Mrs. Coleridge, who had gone on to Greta Hall two days before, and by the Southseys. Wordsworth arrived the following afternoon. On the return to Grasmere, Southey accompanied them through the vale of Legbesthwaite.

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, II, 303.

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, II, 307.

<sup>30</sup> GW. MSS. De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth, 25 March 1808.

## V

ON November 14 De Quincey was back in Oxford<sup>31</sup> just in time to save the Michaelmas term, one week of which only he had spent in residence.<sup>32</sup> He returned with two of the great events of his life behind him; a new man, as he has told us. Certainly he had had an eventful autumn: he had met Coleridge; he had placed the object of his veneration under heavy obligation; he had attended Coleridge's family northwards; and he had met Wordsworth. How much this all meant to De Quincey, we are in a fair position to understand. And he had left behind him in Grasmere a very favourable impression, which he may well have felt subconsciously. Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont on 6 December 1807: —<sup>33</sup> 'Mr. De Quincey . . . has promised to take down the heads of the whole course of lectures' — Coleridge's, at the Royal Institution — '(and he is very capable of doing it accurately)', of which he will send a copy to us. He is a remarkable and very interesting young man: very diminutive in person, which to strangers, makes him appear insignificant; and so modest, and so very shy, that even now I wonder how he had ever the courage to address himself to my brother by letter. I think of this young man with extraordinary pleasure, as he is a remarkable instance of the power of my brother's poems over a lonely and contemplative mind, unwarped by any established laws of taste (as far as it is in my power to judge from his letters, and the little I have seen of him) — a pure and innocent mind!'

## VI

HAVING saved his Michaelmas term by the skin of his teeth and deliberately nice calculation, De Quincey went to London for Christmas;<sup>34</sup> and stayed on for most of the winter, until March 5,<sup>35</sup> through a period of physical suffering from that 'strange affection of the head.' He lived at 5 Northum-

<sup>31</sup> GW. MSS. De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth, 5 March 1808.

<sup>32</sup> *Works*, II, 348.

<sup>33</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 325.

<sup>34</sup> He had planned to go to Bristol. (Cottle to De Quincey; *Mems.*, I, 131.)

<sup>35</sup> GW. MSS. De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth, 25 March 1808.

berland Street, and seems to have given most of his time to Coleridge.

'Mr. Coleridge,' he wrote to Dorothy,<sup>36</sup> was at Bristol during the first week of my stay in London; and gave his first lecture so soon after his return' — namely, January 12 — 'that I did not know of his being in Town until some days after: that lecture therefore I did not hear: of his second (and last)' — on February 5; there were two others to follow before April 3 — 'which was given a fortnight afterwards, I meant to have dictated all that I remembered to some acquaintance and to have sent it to Grasmere; but I found that Mr. Coleridge considered it a very imperfect execution of his plan — and that therefore, when he published his lectures (which he said he should do immediately), so far as it differed from the spoken lecture, it would be improved; for Mr. Coleridge was exceedingly ill on [the] day he delivered that lecture — gave only one extempore illustration, I believe, of which he will most probably be reminded by a note. I thought besides that this lecture, from its very subject as a purely historical one, would be less interesting to you than the philosophical one which [will suc]ceed: its general purport was to clear the ground for a just estimate of S[hakespeare] by separating what he had individually from what he had as a member of a particular [nation (?) ] in a particular age.' De Quincey appreciated the interests of the Wordsworth household and did his best to meet them. His own interest in Coleridge coincided; and this period is pre-eminently notable for his association with the poet-philosopher.

'Coleridge was at that time living uncomfortably enough at the "Courier" office, in the Strand. In such a situation, annoyed by the sound of feet passing his chamber-door continually to the printing rooms of this great establishment, and with no gentle ministrations of female hands to sustain his cheerfulness, naturally enough his spirits flagged; and he took more than ordinary doses of opium. I called upon him daily, and pitied his forlorn condition.'<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> GW. MSS. 25 March 1808.

<sup>37</sup> *Works*, II, 188. 'The ministrations of female hands' at this moment sounds rather sentimental, since Coleridge and his wife were on bad terms with one another, and De Quincey knew it. For early in February (I think)

De Quincey was himself indulging in opium the while<sup>88</sup> with more restraint; but whether the common bond of opium-eating strengthened the sympathy between them or not can only be conjectured. The younger man was certainly useful in cheering the melancholy philosopher, and came to be a constant and almost necessary comfort as certain notes still existing show. Thus for example, on Tuesday, 2 February 1808, Coleridge wrote:

'Dear De Quincey, — I have suffered considerable alarm at not having seen you for so many days; lest you should be ill, or malaccident have befallen you.' And he went on to give a pathetic and depressing account of his own terrible condition. Then he brought himself up short. 'I write, however, not to trouble your feeling with useless concern, — indeed I had not the most distant intention of doing so, or even Thought, till I had already written it, from blind Instinct of the Heart's Weakness, — but first and chiefly to ascertain whether any worse cause has prevented my seeing you than

1808, Cottle wrote to De Quincey, in a passage not printed by Japp, as follows: — 'I have not heard from Coleridge for some weeks, and your letter has informed me of the melancholy cause.' (Probably opium.) 'His constitution is evidently undermined, to which mental anxiety has largely contributed. His connection with Mrs. Coleridge is a canker-worm at his heart, and I am afraid this (in some respects) morbid feeling, is too much encouraged by some persons, by whom he is surrounded, and in so doing are friends, and at the same time unfriendly. A practical recognition of that Providence in which he professes to believe would throw much light on the subject, and teach him to receive even this dispensation as ultimately designed for his good. Altho' Mrs. Coleridge's mind and habits are uncongenial with his own, yet he is married to her, he has children by her, and it is unwise and morally wrong to be so often pondering on the thought how great his happiness would be if he were married to another rather than to one, whom in his youth he deliberately chose and for whom I well recollect he discovered as much fondness, as most young men feel, or seem to feel before marriage. Marriages would be more happy if persons were to consult their reason more and their passions less. I always anticipated the effects of this union of mind with matter; but seeing he is married and has a family, he should make the best of a bad affair, especially as no impropriety of conduct has been charged on Mrs. Coleridge.' (BS. MSS.)

<sup>88</sup> Coleridge, in a passage written 7 January 1830 (Gilman, *Life of Coleridge*, p. 251) tells that he 'pleaded with flowing tears and with agony of forewarning' to prevent De Quincey from following him into the habits of opium. Coleridge goes on, 'He utterly denied it' — the fact that he was addicted to the drug; 'but I fear that I had even then to *deter* perhaps not to forewarn.' The incidents Coleridge is recalling, would presumably be those of about this time. De Quincey was apparently keeping his use of opium a strict secret. (See *Works*, III, 224 ff.)



the distance, the weather, and preoccupation; and, secondly, to say that, no relapse happening to make it absolutely impracticable, or other cause equivalent, I shall give my lecture on Friday afternoon, two o'clock, and that an admission Ticket will be left for you with the Doorkeeper, unless I hear from you that you cannot come. . . . I do not know why — probably from my own low spirits and general languor of heart — I have had Bodings utterly out of all Proportion to the exact number of days that you have been absent.' <sup>80</sup>

De Quincey was not merely a friendly caller, he became during these months a helper in other ways. He tells us in a passage estimating the success, or rather ill success, of the lectures, that among the defects were passages unhappily chosen to illustrate Coleridge's ideas. 'Nor do I remember any that produced much effect, except two or three, which I myself put ready marked into his hands, among the *Metrical Romances* edited by Ritson.' The state of Coleridge's mind makes this no empty boast; poor Coleridge was only too glad to receive any help that would save him exertion. But there is other evidence of Coleridge's attachment to the Oxford undergraduate; in a letter undated but certainly of this spring or winter. 'And now permit me, my dear young friend, to do justice to myself as to one part of a character which has not many *positive* bad points in it, though in a moral *marasmus* from negatives, from misdemeanors of omission, and from weakness and moral cowardice of moral pain. But I can affirm with a *sense of certainty*, intuitively distinguished from a mere delusive feeling of *positiveness*, that no man I have ever known is less affected by partiality to his own productions or thoughts. . . . I do therefore earnestly ask of you as a proof of Friendship that you will so far get over your natural modesty and timidity as without reserve or withholding to tell me exactly what you think and feel on the perusal of anything I may submit to you — for even if it be only your feelings, they will be valuable to me: far more indeed than those criticisms in which the feeling is not stated and mere objections made which, being weak, have in one or two instances prevented my perception of real defects, which I should have dis-

covered if it had been said, "There is something amiss in this; I feel it — perhaps it may be so and so — perhaps not, but something I feel amiss." God bless you! Be assured of my unfeigned esteem. S. T. Coleridge.'<sup>40</sup> Thus De Quincey at twenty-two was the trusted, the necessary, friend of the great Coleridge!

## VII

IN spite of his illness, in spite of the considerable time he devoted to Coleridge, De Quincey had some society of a more general sort. We know little of his social movements; but there are a few references to college friends in London. One was to be married, and he was solicited to stay on for the ceremony. 'I am intimate with all parties,' he said, describing the bride, 'a female Crichton — painter, harpist, pianist, linguist.'<sup>41</sup> Another college friend, Richard Smith, lent him his rooms during his own absence from town. But his acquaintance was chiefly enlarged through his intimacy with Coleridge. At Coleridge's rooms he met Lamb again and came to appreciate for the first time the real value of the man; he met also Sir Humphry Davy, and doubtless others of that distinguished circle. Then, when Wordsworth came to London, he saw him more or less, and heard Wordsworth read the rest of the *White Doe*.<sup>42</sup>

De Quincey was back in Oxford on March 5; and was busy reading for honours until May 13 or 14; then he walked off — probably to London. He was there soon after, at any rate. London had a firm hold upon him. There more completely than anywhere else could he be free in his actions, free from external regulations. He could take opium there as he liked; he could hear the opera, and lose himself in the life of the great city. At this time he had been of age for two years and was financially independent; and he was still feeling that his capital was practically inexhaustible. He was 'living in the book-shops, buying the volumes which he was shortly to transport to Grasmere — a library growing to some five thousand

<sup>40</sup> *Memls.*, I, 136.

<sup>41</sup> *Page*, I, 141.

<sup>42</sup> *GW. MS.* De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth, 25 March 1808.

volumes. Whenever he went to London he was only too glad to take commissions from his friends to look for books. His uncle from India appealed to him; Wordsworth and Coleridge constantly used his knowledge. De Quincey probably knew the book-shops of London — new and second-hand — better than any other man of his time.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 468.

CHAPTER IX  
THE CONVENTION OF CINTRA

1809

I

DE QUINCEY had first visited Wordsworth in the late autumn of 1807. He had finally left Oxford in May 1808. On June 15 he was living at 5 Northumberland Street, Maryle-Bone.<sup>1</sup> On 7 July 1808 Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to him there: 'I will not speak of our sorrow for your illness. You are recovered now and we rejoice in thankfulness. At any time, and as soon as ever it suits you, we shall be most glad to see you. We are *settled* in our new house [Allan Bank] where we now have plenty of room and quietness for you. You may always have a sitting-room below stairs, and a bed-room above to yourself. . . . With kind love to you from my Brother and Sister, I am, dear Sir, your affectionate Friend, Dorothy Wordsworth. . . . Pray write and tell us when to expect you.'<sup>2</sup> He was an accepted friend; and the urgency of the invitation and the thought of the circle ready to receive him pulled him strongly towards Grasmere. But his motions were, as usual, neither direct nor swift.

He went back to Everton to stay until October;<sup>3</sup> but by the first of November, he was installed with the Wordsworths.<sup>4</sup> On December 8 Dorothy wrote to Mrs. Clarkson: 'Mr. De Quincey, whom you would love dearly, as I am sure I do, is beside me, quietly turning over the leaves of a Greek book — and God be praised we are breathing a clear air, for the night is calm, and this room (the dining-room) only smokes very much in a high wind. Mr. De Q. will stay with us, we hope, at least till the spring. We feel often as if he were one of the family — he is loving and happy — a very good

<sup>1</sup> Page, I, 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 468.

<sup>3</sup> On October 9 he had been recently there. (*Memls.*, I, 277.)

<sup>4</sup> On November 12 Southey wrote his brother in a letter quoted by Masson (*Works*, V, 19n.) 'Little Mr. De Quincey is at Grasmere. He was here last week, and is coming again. I wish he was not so little, and I wish he would not leave his greatcoat always behind him on the road. But he is a very able man, with a head brim-ful of information.'

scholar, and an acute logician — so much for his mind and manners. His person is unfortunately diminutive, but there is a sweetness in his looks, especially about the eyes, which soon overcomes the oddness of your first feeling at the sight of so little a man. John sleeps with him and is passionately fond of him.' <sup>5</sup>

Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Mrs. Wordsworth, were also members of the Wordsworth household during that winter. Much planning was centred on *The Friend* which Coleridge was undertaking to write. The prospectuses promised a beginning on 1 January 1809; but the first number did not actually appear until June. One of the difficulties was to find the right printer — it was finally printed at Penrith; but one of the schemes to publish it included the establishment of a printing plant at Grasmere, whence not only *The Friend* but, also, a series of some of the great classics could be issued.<sup>6</sup> It was De Quincey's plan. Coleridge wrote: 'De Quincey, besides his erudition, has a great turn for manual operations, and is, even to old bachelor preciseness, accurate and regular in all he does. It is his determination, to have printed under his own eyes, immaculate editions of such eminently great classics, English and Greek, as most need it; and to begin with the poetic works of Milton.' The plan was primarily, without question, to help Coleridge; needless to say, it was never carried out.<sup>7</sup>

Even more absorbing to the household, during these winter months, than *The Friend* and its problems was the work which Wordsworth had in hand, 'a work which occupies all his thoughts. It will be a pamphlet of considerable length, entitled *The Convention of Cintra brought to the Test of Principles and the People of England justified from the charge of Prejudging*, or something to that effect.'<sup>8</sup> The disgraceful

<sup>5</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 389.

<sup>6</sup> Coleridge to D. Stuart, 27 February 1809; *Letters from the Lake Poets to Daniel Stuart* (1889), p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> There is one other reference to the scheme in a letter of De Quincey to Dorothy, 25 May 1809 (GW. MSS.). 'I had nearly made up a set of Milton's Prose Works in his own corrected editions — which will enable the Grasmere Press to issue a better edition of Milton's whole works than has yet been given.'

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson, *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 389. The famous Convention of Cintra which so stirred the indignation of

Convention had stirred Wordsworth to political and moral indignation; and the great pamphlet was to express his passionate thought in ways only surpassed by his best poetry. But as was the case in all of Wordsworth's creative work, the treatise was slow to evolve and agonizing in its composition. It was on the stocks during the entire winter, while the public interest in the Convention itself was rapidly cooling. As the pamphlet progressed and the printing was being done in London without any immediate oversight, it became evident that some one should be near the press who could obviate the delays involved in sending proofs from London to Grasmere by slow conveyance, to be corrected and returned by the same uncertain route. At this juncture, De Quincey, who had been watching the growth of the pamphlet with enthusiasm, and who had discussed the Spanish situation with Wordsworth point by point so that he was thoroughly imbued with the subject and the author's ideas, offered his services to go to London to act as proof-reader and director on the spot. He was always eager to be helpful; here was his chance to assist the man and the family whom he adored. He was the natural person to be entrusted with the task; he had been reading the proofs of the first pages at Allan Bank. His fitness was recognized and his offer was accepted.<sup>9</sup> Seeing the work through the press occupied the entire spring of 1809, and, thanks to constant letters passing between De Quincey and Grasmere, this period is unusually well documented.<sup>10</sup>

## II

DE QUINCEY left Grasmere on his mission on 20 February 1809. His mind was full of the Peninsular situation; his knowledge of the events in Spain, he tells us, he had 'brought

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England, as well as Byron's and Wordsworth's, was the agreement between the English leaders of the army in the Spanish Peninsula and General Junot, the leader of Napoleon's army, after the French had been badly defeated at Vimiero, by which Junot's troops were allowed to return to France from Portugal with all their baggage (30 August 1808). The terms of this iniquitous document were discussed hotly for many months.

<sup>9</sup> GW. MSS. Letter of De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth, 25 March 1809.

<sup>10</sup> The letters from the Wordsworths are for the most part already printed; those from De Quincey, in the manuscripts of Mr. Gordon Wordsworth, are unprinted.

to as much accuracy as anybody can who was not personally engaged in them';<sup>11</sup> and he was excited over the pamphlet and his part in it. He was fresh from three months of delightful domestication where he had been happy as never before; where he had been intimate with his supreme literary heroes, and had become affectionately attached to Mrs. Wordsworth, Dorothy, and above all, to the Wordsworth children. And he felt that he was loved in return. When he left, he was impelled to write back to them about all that bore upon the Peninsular campaign; and, in minute detail, anything in his own doings which could in any way entertain them. The result was a copiousness of correspondence surprising even to himself.<sup>12</sup> He was always apologizing for haste; he was trying to catch a post, or he had just missed one. 'But the truth is,' he said, 'that I never can write a letter beforehand with any pleasure; and, therefore, if I have not leisure allowed me just at that time when it suits the post — and when both suit my inclination — I find it difficult to write at all.' Above all, he *hated* to write. 'I am held between two forces — my hatred of letter-writing generically — and my love for communication, by any mode or channel, with Grasmere.' Moreover, he was a slow writer. 'You perhaps do not know how long I am in filling a sheet of paper; for I have really been an hour over this.' A sheet for him meant a quarto sheet, very closely and finely written, filled to the last square inch of space.<sup>13</sup> He was particular about writing materials; and he often complained of a bad pen or bad paper.

The correspondents at Allan Bank were all the members of the family. Most of the letters were addressed to Dorothy; and she of all those at Grasmere wrote oftenest. Through her passed most of the matters relating to the pamphlet — doubts, suggestions, questions. Now and then Wordsworth wrote directly and was directly answered. Sometimes Wordsworth dictated to Sara Hutchinson. Now and then, Mrs. Words-

<sup>11</sup> GW. MSS. 30 September 1809.

<sup>12</sup> On April 29, when the series of letters was hardly half completed, he wrote, 'If my epistolary labours since I left Grasmere were all collected together, surely there would be enough to astonish all those who have ever known me before.'

<sup>13</sup> GW. MSS. 17 May 1809.

worth wrote and was answered. Now and then one of the ladies would add a postscript to another's letter. It was quite literally a *Wordsworth family* correspondence.

The main subject of the letters was, of course, the pamphlet; but many other things slipped in. From Grasmere came news of the doings and sayings of the children, or of the goings and comings of Coleridge or other friends; or the progress of preparations at the cottage at Town End which was being put into order for De Quincey; for immediately after he left Grasmere, Dove Cottage was hired for him as a permanent residence. On De Quincey's side the letters were concerned with the pamphlet *ad infinitum*; but there were also foreign news, political items, personal doings, hunts for books, messages for the children.

### III

HE began with a kind of diary, recording all sorts of detail. He felt a certain exultation in his journey and in the task before him.

'Feb. 21st. — *Rose at half past 4!* — breakfasted by 9 in Lancaster; — here took up a foreigner who railed at the Spaniards — attributing to them all the disasters and hardships of *our* army (as he had the audacity to call it): I suggested that he must first prove the fact that Galicia had failed *our* army in any express or implied engagements made to it; — 2nd. if she had, he must prove that this was not a *necessary* consequence of her own poverty; — 3rd. he must prove if this were not so — but a *voluntary* withholdg. of assistance, that Galicia who had not created but adopted the war was to be held an evidence of what might be expected fm. the South. — In answer he said, that as to the 1st. point, he had lately seen 60 English soldiers who had served in Spain — and agreed that of 2 evils — French and Spaniards — the French were far the least; — that as to the 3rd., he had lived within 20 miles of Bayonne, and *therefore* must be allowed to understand the Spanish character. — A Farmer who sat opposite, approved of all that the foreigner said — adding, by way of confirmation, "Why, it was but the other day that a *Portighee* (and that's all one with a Spaniard) killed an Englishman at Plymouth with a knife." — (here telling a story which was in the papers some months ago). — After it was agreed that *Portighees* and *Spaniards* were "all one," I thought it better to say no more. — At Preston took up, among



others, a man lookg. like a lawyer — and an intelligent looking young man. Something being said, when the coach stopped for a few minutes, about Spain — the young man asked me how the war there was going on; and to my great surprise, I found that he knew literally nothing of what had happened in Spain since last summer — not even that Bonaparte had entered it. The next time the coach stopped, I began — at his desire — to give him a sketch of the campaign. I had just got to the skirmish of Tudela — when he interrupted me with — “Well, but the English have an army there?” — at this moment the coach began to move — and the road fm. Lancatr. to L-pool being all paved made such a rattling that I who sat at a distance fm. the young man (it was a *long* coach) could not go on; — but unfortunately the lawyer, who sate opposite to him, took upon himself to answer this question; and I had the misery for a whole quarter of an hour of sitting without being able to hear what he said but catching here and there — “Sir J. Moore” — “Corunna” — etc. — and not doubting that the whole was a horrible compost fm. English Gazettes — private letters — French bulletins, etc. — However, I resolved what to do: and accordingly when we arrived at Liverpool (about dusk) instead of going to the house of an acquaintance — I went into the Inn Coffee-room, guessing that the young man — who seeming a stranger — would come in also: — he soon did; and I had the pleasure of seeing him making his way up to the place where I sat: — there I disabused him of all the lies which no doubt the lawyer had told him — by expounding to him from the beginning all which had happened in both Spain and Portugal. — When I had finished, I could not help expressing to him my surprise that anything of what I had told him should be news to him: he unriddled the matter by telling me that he was an American who had just come over in one of the ships which had broke the Embargo. — He told me that in America they were absorbed in their own domestic feuds too much to take any interest in any European news which did not bear directly on their interests. He gave me some anecdotes about Maddison’s [*sic*] election, which he said, was carried by the Irish votes — and in 2 states by fraudulent means; — the Irish making it their single inquiry — What will distress England? — *Gallatin* is not, as Mr. Coleridge (I think) supposed a French-man but a Swiss — and has qualified himself by the statutable residence — Englishmen are still in most states better received than men of any other nation — He seemed, from the style of his answers, very well able to have given me a great deal of useful information — if I had not been too sleepy to extract it. — The next morning, when I came down to break-

fast (though it was really not 10 o'clock) I was sorry to meet the American at the door of the Coffee-room just going out on business: and I had no opportunity of seeing him again."<sup>14</sup>

As De Quincey approached London, on Saturday, February 25, he was met by the news that Drury Lane Theatre was burning; and considerable space was given to descriptions of this catastrophe; for he visited the still smoking ruins even before he sought for lodgings. He was forced to put up with a poor room for the first night at Charing Cross; a better at the New Hummums for the second; and, finally, he was obliged to take permanent quarters at 82 Great Titchfield Street — where he remained so long as he was in London — instead of at 5 Northumberland Street, where he was used to stay and where his mail was being addressed by his friends until they could know of his new abode.

#### IV

THEN for the task for which he had come, namely, seeing the pamphlet through the press! The job of printing was in the hands of Baldwin whose press was near Blackfriar's Bridge — three quarters of an hour away from Great Titchfield Street, even for the rapid walking of De Quincey; a fact which before the pamphlet was published was to afford him much exercise. At the time he arrived, some ninety-six pages of the text were already printed, so that he was absolved from any possible supervision of that earlier part. His job was to hasten the remaining portions, to correct proof, to make such changes as circumstances and the quick movements of a living situation in the Peninsula demanded. He was given a free hand wherever it was not possible to wait for specific instructions from Grasmere. Above all, he was to look to the punctuation; 'for,' said Wordsworth, 'at the time the subject of punctuation in prose was one to which I had never attended, and had of course settled no scheme of it in my own mind. I deputed that office to Mr. De Quincey.'<sup>15</sup> In all but proof-reading and corrections, De Quincey had, however, a coadjutor in the

<sup>14</sup> GW. MSS. n.d.; but 26-7 February 1809.

<sup>15</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 456.

person of Daniel Stuart, the proprietor of *The Courier*, the friend of Coleridge and Wordsworth.<sup>16</sup>

De Quincey came to London without any 'copy' for the pamphlet; that was to be sent on to him as it was written, piecemeal. For the first week after his arrival nothing came. (March 2.) But he found material in the hands of the printer which had not yet been set up; he found some proof awaiting correction; and, in addition, considerable confusion to be straightened out. The week was apparently not wasted.

On March 4 came four manuscript sheets — and the work began. 'After tea last night, I read the sheets through with great delight; and this day I have pointed the greatest part of them; — to-morrow morning they will be given to the compositor with injunctions to set them immediately.' (March 5.) But there were difficulties. Wordsworth was a careless writer in spite of all his pains. 'One sentence is left imperfect, and unfortunately there is nothing to *determine* me in the correction.' De Quincey therefore asked whether the sentence should read *this way* or *that*. While he was waiting for instructions, he *must* send the printer one version to fill the hiatus. But when Wordsworth finally on March 30, after long delay, wrote him in regard to the passage in question, he said, 'The hiatus about knowledge you supplied as I wrote it'; but *which* of the alternatives De Quincey had offered *was* 'as Wordsworth wrote it'?<sup>17</sup> Then there were revisions to improve style. 'One alteration I ventured to make,' wrote De Quincey, 'for sake of euphony in the clause, — viz. "for reasons which may be added to those (which I have) already given" — I struck out the words within *the brackets*, as it seemed to be overladen with *whiches*.' (March 5.) And there were many other corrections for purposes of precision of phrase; for truth of fact, as well as for euphony.<sup>18</sup>

On March 11, De Quincey received the copy winding up the body of the pamphlet, but not the Appendix. 'The whole of this latter part — especially the part about the incompetence of ordinary statesmen to deal with indefinite

<sup>16</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 391.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 405.

<sup>18</sup> A long list was given in a letter of March 11.

things — seems to me more beautiful than anything I ever read in prose. One thing I grieve for, that the work ends with a *quotation*; which to me destroys the feelings of a full choral peroration.' (March 11.) But Wordsworth did not accept the criticism, and the final quotation still stands. The same day brought a letter 'containing the supplementary intercalations.' It was not too late, 'for being anxious about the exact reading of the imperfect sentence . . . I have not suffered the printer to strike off any sheets *finally* since I came to London' — a precaution justified by the event, since changes and afterthoughts were to come from Wordsworth until after the first of April.

On March 29 came another letter from Wordsworth with alterations, or suggestions: 'But do this, or let it alone, just as you like. Insert also that part of my note, or not, as you deem advisable, or feel inclination: only let what is said about General Ferguson be inserted, both in justice to him, to me and to the subject.'<sup>19</sup> Much latitude was given; but wishes must have had the weight of directions, and must have caused many hours of pondering as to the desirabilities and possibilities.<sup>20</sup> Some of Wordsworth's suggestions were adopted unwillingly at the expense of hampering the press; in one instance, of dislocating no less than five 'cases.' In short, with the best intentions in the world to speed things up for Wordsworth, De Quincey was hindered by slow copy and suggestions. He was held up, however, by other difficulties than those offered by the author.

# V

THERE was the press to reckon with — and this involved a minor epic which can be only partly retold. Soon after De Quincey arrived in London, he wrote (on March 11), 'With respect to the printing' — of the portion set up before he arrived — 'nothing can be more correct: — they have attended to all the corrections of any consequence.' But by March 21 trouble began. 'Latterly — a new compositor having been set to work upon the pamphlet — the proofs are filled with

<sup>19</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 399.

<sup>20</sup> A long accounting for his decisions was given in a letter of April 1.

such monstrous errors (whole passages left out — and words substituted which have a *kind* of meaning etc.) that I am now obliged to insist on having a *second* proof before they are laid aside to be struck off.' And four days later, he was fearful of letting any part be printed off, until he had seen a third proof. 'I rose before from *one* to *two* and, I believe, the compositor thinking that I shall soon want a dozen.' (March 25.)

As errors increased, De Quincey's care increased in equal ratio. The passages of explanation as to his activities prove his infinite pains and his passion for perfection. For example, in the same letter of March 25, he wrote to Dorothy: — 'I scarcely ever feel satisfied, until I have collated the proof 3 or 4 times with the M.S. to be sure that nothing is left out — added — or altered; — and then afterwards (which is far the most fatiguing part of the labour) inspected it *verbatim et literatim* — to see that the words are truly spelt. In this last office — as the labour is not lightened by *understanding* a word of what I am going over — it is difficult to think how often one may read a word mis-spelt without knowing it to be so. — Some days ago, I discovered that, in one proof, *Sargossa* was spelt *Sargossa*; and yet this proof I had gone over at least 15 times without discovering that it was so.' Here, indeed, was care — elaborate care; and perhaps one need not wonder that Wordsworth, who was on the whole more eager for speed of publication than for the last niceness of accuracy, wrote back a mild remonstrance: — 'I am truly sorry for the trouble you are put to, and beg that you would not be so anxious, particularly as to a misspelt word or so.' <sup>21</sup>

Yet in spite of all his pains, the results were discouraging. On March 28 he had been over the proofs three or four times, 'and detected only one error of the press — viz. an insertion of a word (added, I suppose in the margin) in a wrong part of the line: but at the same time it must be mentioned that in the *punctuation* all my care (before the time I arrived in Town) has been wholly thrown away: <sup>22</sup> the stupid compositor having attended to my alterations or not, *ad libitum*; and

<sup>21</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 398.

<sup>22</sup> This would seem to refer to copy which he had gone over at Grasmere and which had been sent after him.

thus in many places made the punctuation farther from what I designed it for (viz. a representative of the logical divisions — and a gamut of proportions and symmetry of the different members — of each sentence) than, if he had followed his ordinary guide — viz. his own blind feeling of propriety: which blind feeling (I told him, for his edification) was not, as he flattered himself, a rude natural dictation from the demands of the case: but a dictation from the artificial and conventional demands grounded at first on pure caprice, a non-perception of the possibility of logical equilibration of sentences: — that, in short, it was nothing more than an abstraction from all which he had read; put to the test generally by his own eye; and now and then, perhaps, by his voice. In consequence of this solemn remonstrance (which I believe he took for an imprecation) I have now even the first proofs pretty accurate in this point.'

## VI

THEN came delays and promises. The first serious interruption appeared in the letter of April 5. 'This is Easter week with us; and everybody is idle on Monday; most people on Tuesday; and a great many all the week. So that I am sorry to say, the pamphlet has languished since Saturday' — he was writing on Wednesday. 'However, to-day if the men can be made to attend, the overseer promises that it shall begin to advance again by forced marches. If therefore you do not receive a letter from me on Tuesday next, you may conclude it is because I am haunted by — or haunting — Mr. Baldwin's fiends: for, if I give them half an hour's respite, they are ready to make that an excuse for going off to some other work.' On the 15th: 'What is the cause of the delay, I cannot learn. Mr. Stewart [sic], whom I saw some day this week (I forget which) promised me to call on Mr. Baldwin as he was going that way; but they have gone on no better since.' De Quincey's explanation was this: 'They have such innumerable demands on *immediate* attention at this press in the shape of *bills*, etc. that they hold no promises if anything of this kind interferes.' But he would see Baldwin again that night. Then, ten days later (April 25), his complaints were again written at length:

'Last week, out of the six days, the man attended *two*; and must then undoubtedly have been drunk from the absurd blunders and omissions which he made; — and they *will* not (they say *can* not) put any other compositor to the work. . . Last night, when I was at the press, I found that the compositor had never appeared the whole day.' But on the 29th a new workman was on, and things were expected at last to move without stopping. Then he added, 'Notwithstanding the blame having been all along thrown upon the compositor's drunkenness at the press' — not by De Quincey, but by the press itself; a fact to note — 'I have learnt a circumstance which makes me doubt this much.'

## VII

MEANTIME the delays began to awaken reactions in those at Grasmere and in Mr. Stuart, as perhaps one might expect. On May 2 Coleridge wrote a letter to Stuart, from Greta Hall, which is the chief source of the idea that the delays in the publication of the Cintra pamphlet were due to De Quincey's procrastination and fussy over-carefulness.

'My dear Stuart, — I both respect and have affection for Mr. De Quincey, but saw too much of his turn of mind, anxious yet dilatory, confused over accuracy, and at once systematic and labyrinthine, not fully to understand how great a plague he might easily be to a London printer; his natural tediousness made yet greater by his zeal and fear of not discharging his trust; and superadded to Wordsworth's own sibyl's leaves, blown about by the changeful winds of an anxious author's second thoughts. Wordsworth, however, has received impressions of a very different sort, which, if I had known, I should not perhaps have stated my own quite so freely as I did in my letter to him, on my receipt of yours. Mr. De Quincey has informed him, that the compositor has been drunk ever since Easter week; — in one of the weeks attending at the printing office only two days, during which time he must have been in a state of intoxication, as the proofs were sent with the omission of whole sentences; and Mr. Baldwin either could not or would not set another man to the work, though frequently requested to do so. They have certainly reason to complain of chopping and changing in *one* instance; but for these last five weeks there has not been the slightest alteration made either in the text or the notes: not a word altered in the proofs when returned, and

only for the punctuation in six places! Such is Mr. De Quincey's statement as given me by Wordsworth in his note of this morning; but of what date Mr. De Q's letter is I know not. I have written to W. stating honestly my convictions that he will not find Baldwin so much in the wrong as he now believes, and that he ought to bring before his own fancy all his *own copy* from the beginning of the work, and compare it in his mind's eye, with the sort of copy, and the mode of receiving it to which Baldwin had been probably accustomed. That to Mr. De Quincey's positive statement, it was impossible for me to offer doubts or objections; but yet I cannot blame myself for having, anterior to it, received a strong impression, from an account so strictly correspondent to my own experience, of Mr. De Quincey's particularities: especially as the wish to excuse the neglect of a vicious drunken journeyman appeared to me a very unlikely temptation to a respectable tradesman, to impose a falsehood on a man like you.' Then he added: 'After the instances I saw of Mr. De Q's marvellous slowness in writing a note to a pamphlet, when at Grasmere,<sup>23</sup> the sum and meaning of which I had dictated in better and more orderly sentences in five minutes and considering the superlative need of despatch since that time, I can never retract my expression of vexation and surprise, that W. should have entrusted anything to him beyond the mere correction of the Proofs.'<sup>24</sup>

Stuart had evidently written to Coleridge expressing some doubts as to De Quincey's conduct of the business in hand, and Coleridge took the trouble to hand on the doubts with emphasis to Wordsworth. But his case is built upon impressions of character and not upon facts; and one can see throughout that subtle disharmony between De Quincey and Coleridge which is even more pronounced in De Quincey's later memories. There is something ironically comic in the superior attitude of Coleridge to both Wordsworth and De Quincey, the Coleridge who was already five months behind his promises in issuing the first number of *The Friend*! It is interesting to notice that Wordsworth had had no misgivings in entrusting the task of seeing the *Convention of Cintra*

<sup>23</sup> What this note is I do not know. It cannot refer to the long note to the Cintra pamphlet on Sir J. Moore. Mrs. Bairdsmith, writing to Dr. Japp in 1877, 'thinks she has heard' that Wordsworth gave De Quincey 'intolerable trouble' to write a note to the Pamphlet and then cancelled the note 'without a word.' (MS. in my possession.) This may be it.

<sup>24</sup> *Letters from the Lake Poets to D. Stuart*, p. 155.



through the press to De Quincey. Indeed, we may infer, that up to this time, he had not begun to repent his choice; so that his later inclination to lay the blame upon his agent may be attributable in part at least to Coleridge's persuasion.

But behind Coleridge was Stuart. His letter to Coleridge is not extant, but it seems to have contained Baldwin's account of, or excuse for, the delays. And De Quincey saw what Stuart was up to. On April 25 he thus wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth: 'In the meantime, though I do not suppose that Mr. Stuart would hazard any representation of the affair without first satisfying himself as to the real cause of the delay, I yet collect from a note which I received from him on Saturday — that he has either guessed — or been told at the press — that it is the multitude of my corrections which causes it: — and indeed they are so ready to make this excuse even to me, who have the means of contradicting it in the dates of my receipts and sendings, etc. that I cannot but suppose that, if he has ever inquired about it at the press, they will to him — for their own credit — have imputed the whole delay to this cause. I must therefore say — that though I have been very rigid in exacting from the compositor a minute attention to all my punctuation, etc. (and am glad to think that I have; because thus, without any time having been really lost, an accuracy has been gained which might have been some compensation if time *had* been lost), — yet no part of the copy has ever been given to him without having been first pointed with so much deliberation that I have not, in half a dozen instances made any changes *after* it has been composed: — where he neglected it — and disturbed the sense — I did of course restore what I had put before; — but in general, ever since I gave him warning that I *should* restore it, he has been remarkably attentive to this point: — and his errors have been of a more serious kind — very often omissions of whole sentences, etc. — and therefore, as I told them at the first, if I have troubled them with numerous corrections, it is because they have troubled me with numerous blunders.' De Quincey felt clearly that he was being accused by Stuart; although Wordsworth, except for the suggestion that De Quincey must not take minutiae too seriously, gave no indica-

tion of being influenced by his friend. Yet De Quincey feared that Stuart was to some extent turning the family at Allan Bank against him.

The idea worried him naturally enough; and he reverted to it. On May 9 he and Stuart were on their way to Baldwin's together, upon De Quincey's request. 'This was the first time we had met at Mr. Baldwin's,' he wrote, 'for we had both been separately several times before: but as the pamphlet was going on at the old pace, and as I found fm. Mr. Stuart's note of Sat. night that they persisted in making one set of excuses to me and another to him (telling him that it was all my fault)' — De Quincey proposed that together they should confront all the different persons concerned. He found on the walk to Blackfriars that 'they did not accuse me of keeping back copy — or at least that they did not make that their ordinary charge, but of making too many corrections (of which I spoke formerly)' — in the letter of May 9. 'In the mean time,' he went on, 'I do not know how far I may have been misrepresented to you about the business. Mr. Stuart, I am sure, would not intentionally misrepresent: but not knowing much about me, — he may have some difficulty in disbelieving all that they may have told him at the press: — as I told him yesterday, they serve him as ill as me; for when I shewed them (as I did regularly) his notes to me — they all denied that they laid the blame on me; — though I have no doubt they did. Therefore, I do not know *how* much reason I have to complain of Mr. St. I am sure I have some.'

He probably never knew; but we have Wordsworth's letter to Poole<sup>25</sup> full of impatient bitterness, the compound of Coleridge's convictions and Stuart's reports, in which poor De Quincey is somewhat mercilessly handled. 'My patience is completely wearied out,' Wordsworth wrote. 'I will explain to you the mystery as far as I can.' It was the punctuation which caused the trouble, according to this version. De Quincey 'had been so scrupulous with the compositor, *in having his own plan rigorously followed to an iota*, that the man took the pet, and whole weeks elapsed without the book

<sup>25</sup> Wordsworth Family Letters, I, 455.

advancing a step.' Here was a new reason, namely the compositor's resentment. Was it offered by Stuart? In any case, the whole fault was laid upon De Quincey. One can hardly blame Wordsworth for warmth of feeling; and perhaps with this warmth, he could not have explained the mystery of delay in any other way. But as we consider all the evidence, it seems that De Quincey was hardly given fair consideration.

Even if De Quincey had been acting the part of Remora in slowing up the pamphlet — and I for one do not believe that the evidence supports the charge — he was acting the part of a generous friend, giving three months of his time to the task without any other reward than the satisfaction of helping the man — the family — whom he most revered in the world. His motives were devotion and gratitude. If in his desire to do his very best, he sought correctness at the expense of speed — and the evidence is against it — one could only blame his judgment. But with all the available evidence in hand, the only grounds for the claim that he held up the press came from Baldwin — an interested party, and presumably prejudiced — through Stuart, and were enlarged on general considerations after the fact by Coleridge, and were seized upon by Wordsworth out of a desire to find a reason for delays which, from the remoteness of Grasmere, must have been not only irritating but maddeningly inexplicable.

Wordsworth never took De Quincey to task for the delay, whatever he may have said to Coleridge and Stuart, and certainly did say to Poole. Yet De Quincey can hardly have escaped feeling that Wordsworth blamed him; and is it too fanciful to believe that this suspicion was *one* of the causes which ultimately brought about a rift between the two men? There were also minor frictions and misunderstandings inevitably involved in such a situation. Thus, for example, when Wordsworth misinterpreted the tenor of a note in which De Quincey had suggested an alteration in the pamphlet to meet an unforeseen development in Spain, De Quincey wrote to him 'to complain a little of the very great injustice which [Wordsworth] has done [him] in what relates to Saragossa';<sup>26</sup> and De Quincey's apology for his heat a little later only shows

<sup>26</sup> GW. MSS. 1 April 1809.

how much he was irritated: — 'I felt (and expressed, I dare say) some surprise and sense of injustice; but, I hope, nothing more: I mean, nothing which could lead you to think seriously that I felt any soreness or unkindly feelings of any kind which could make me ready to imagine "new matter for misconception" in your letter on this subject;' and he begged Wordsworth to 'excuse anything which may have been improper in my mode of expressing my feelings and to believe that my love and veneration for all at Grasmere are far too great for it to be possible that I should ever let the sun go down upon any feelings of petty vexation or anger in any case; but in the present I did not in my thoughts accuse you of more than having read my letter too hastily to see *what* alteration it was that I proposed respecting Saragossa — and then very naturally classed me with the multitudes who are dupes of French bulletins. But I am now perfectly sure that it was *I* who misapprehended *you*.' <sup>27</sup> But smooth it over as he would, he had been angered by his hero, and he was no longer in the attitude of pure worship.

## VIII

ABOUT the first of May there suddenly appeared a new difficulty, this time at Grasmere. Wordsworth was seized by a panic lest something in the pamphlet might be actionable for libel. The first mention of it is in a letter of Dorothy to De Quincey of May 6, in which she jestingly referred to William's anxieties. 'William still continues to haunt himself with fancies about Newgate and Dorchester or some other gaol, but as his mind clings to the gloomy, Newgate is his favorite theme. We, however, have no fears, for even if the words be actionable (which I cannot but think they are not), in these times they would not dare to inflict such a punishment.' <sup>28</sup> But William took no such light view. He wrote to Stuart for his judgement. The passage that most troubled him was: 'What greater punishment could there be than to have brought upon themselves the unremovable contempt and hatred of their countrymen?' Wordsworth must have been

<sup>27</sup> GW. MSS. 15 April 1809.

<sup>28</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 435.

feeling very jumpy; but one gathers from his biography that he was a man of caution. He wrote to De Quincey again and again, urging him to see Stuart and to act upon their collective wisdom, cancelling sheets if need be, regardless of delays.

Stuart and De Quincey held conferences and consulted Baldwin. Stuart seemed at one time to agree with Wordsworth that there was something to be afraid of, and again with De Quincey that there was not. The details are interesting from our point of view, as showing the meticulous care De Quincey used in carrying out the task laid upon him. Thus on May 13 just after receiving a letter from Wordsworth he wrote to Dorothy:

' I shall go first to the Courier office; and shall there propose that, *if Mr. Stuart is not quite sure that there is nothing libellous in the pamphlet*, the publication may be delayed till Tuesday; ' — it was not finally ready for printing until May 17 — ' that, in the course of this night and to-morrow, I should finally read through the whole pamphlet — marking every passage about which there can be doubt; and then, Monday morning, giving the whole collection of passages so marked to Mr. Stuart for his decision upon them; — which as they cannot certainly be very numerous he can give in an hour.' And on Tuesday, the 16th.: — ' Sunday: — Read over the whole pamphlet; and extracted all the passages (about *eight* I think) which I thought could be suspected of being libellous. Monday: — called on Mr. Stuart by appointment, at 10 o'clock; found him out; but left my paper; — called at 3: found that he had returned: and had weighed all my extracts. He thought not one of these libellous: but strange to say! — thought one which I had not suspected so much as to think worth extracting — a libel. This was the passage — " that the British army *swarms* with those who are incompetent " — is plain, etc. He was sure it was libellous: and thought government would be happy to have an opportunity of avenging themselves under the masque of standing up for the army. I was sure it was *not* a libel: . . . We then walked away together to the press — to direct about it. . . . We arrived at the press; — Mr. Baldwin was summoned; . . . Mr. Baldwin joined me, and I obtained the victory over Mr. Stuart. . . . The half-sheet was therefore *not* cancelled; — for Mr. Baldwin was peremptory in his opinion that nobody could appear as prosecutor in the first place; — and 2ndly. that no libel could be made out if any man could claim to be the object of it.' <sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> There is a very long restatement of the episode in a letter of May 31.

## IX

MEANTIME, on March 29, Wordsworth requested De Quincey to write a note upon the letters of Sir John Moore. 'Now what I wish is, that you would give a review of these Letters, not speaking with any asperity of Sir J. M. though the Letters would thoroughly justify it. . . I know that you have accurately in memory all the events of the campaign;' and he proceeded to outline his ideas as to what should be said.<sup>30</sup> De Quincey, of course, undertook the task. He wrote the note most carefully; but 'under a sense of constraint: making a point to prepare the course of what I was saying to receive nearly all Mr. Wordsworth's thoughts on these letters, and sometimes his words.'<sup>31</sup> The note was finally printed as a Postscript to the brochure, a considerable essay, De Quincey's first known prose composition in print.

When the pamphlet was finally published, Wordsworth on May 24 wrote, 'I am quite satisfied with your note upon Moore, which is very well done.'<sup>32</sup> The praise was no doubt genuine, but certainly not effusive; but then Wordsworth was *not* effusive. A week later, however, Wordsworth was made to feel by Mrs. Wordsworth that he had been perhaps, in the circumstances, a little cool. If there had been some irritation at De Quincey's handling of the pamphlet, here in the note was a thing which could be heartily approved. The tension itself urged enthusiasm. And on May 30 Wordsworth wrote: 'I was reading yesterday to Mrs. Wordsworth your note on Moore's Letters with great pleasure, and expressing at the same time how well it was done; upon which she observed to me, "How, then, did you not use stronger language of approbation?"' He replied that his comment had included everything — "'for," said I, "Mr. De Quincey will do me the justice to believe that, as I know he was completely master of the subject, my expectations would be high; and if I told him that these were answered, what need I or could I say more?"'<sup>33</sup> And Mrs. Wordsworth with her usual gracious-

<sup>30</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 400.

<sup>31</sup> GW. MSS. 17 May 1809.

<sup>32</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 446.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 451.

ness added a postscript of congratulations upon De Quincey's having reached the end of his labours; and of the pleasure which his part of the pamphlet had given them.

To the very end, De Quincey's efforts to speed up the publication were unremitting; but the obstacles were persistent. Even when on May 17 four completed copies were finally sent off to Wordsworth, and early on May 18 when the entire edition of 500 was actually off the press, publication was deferred. To De Quincey's despair he learned that 'it would take until Monday for the sheets to dry,' namely, until the 22nd! Could this interval not be shortened? He rushed to Longman's who was publishing the book, and he saw Mr. Orme. 'If fifty for immediate distribution could be sent up that day, they could be dried at the fire and served in two hours.' They were sent; yet on the 24th copies could not be bought! The pamphlet, however, at last appeared; yet, magnificent as it is, it had no timely or popular appeal. On July 7 Longman's had sold only 170 copies.

The advance copies reached Grasmere. The whole pamphlet was praised; De Quincey's note met with favour. Word came back from Wordsworth that the pamphlet is, on the whole, 'very correctly printed; and the punctuation pleases me much; there are here and there trifling errors in it. I think, indeed, your plan of punctuation admirable.'<sup>84</sup> Thus all ended in outward pleasantness and peace.

<sup>84</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 452.

CHAPTER X  
DE QUINCEY IN LONDON

1809

I

**D**E QUINCEY was never a notable letter-writer; but the series of letters to the Wordsworths in 1809, apart from details concerning the pamphlet, is full of vivid description, lively accounts of rumours of the Napoleonic War, comments upon men and things, and of thoughtfulness for the children and their elders.

In almost every letter there are reports and analyses of the latest news which poured into London unsifted by any organized news-service such as we know. Thus he wrote to Dorothy on May 12:

*SEE THE END OF MY LETTER FOR GLORIOUS  
NEWS!!*

82 gt Titchfield St. Friday night.  
May 12th.

My dear Madam,

I date *Friday* night: because it is really so; but, being after post time this letter will not go till to-morrow. — First, as to the public news: — Our accounts to-day are much more cheerful: that is, speaking only of morning's news; for, if our news of this evening be true, it is more than cheerful. This morning there arrived in London Dutch papers — of as late a date as the day before yesterday (May 10th.): they are so far to be considered good news — that they bring no confirmation of the rumors in the Dutch paper of the 7th. of the Archduke John's having been cut off in a movement towards the Tyrol — and that they make it very probable that on the 19th. of April the Austrians won a battle in Poland. — About 8 o'clock this evening as I came up Fleet Street from the Press, I found that fresh news had arrived from the Continent; though I do not know by what channel. I copy fm. the Statesman the substance: — 'Second Edition: — we understand that intelligence has been received of the Austrians having taken Warsaw after the battle of the 19th. on the frontiers of Poland. — It is stated also that there have been two actions in Italy: one on the Piava, after which the French retreated; they were attacked a second time by the



Archduke John; and defeated with the loss of 6,000 men.' This news I should not mention, but that I found the ministers' official paper — the Sun — had also printed a second edition. — It strengthens the probabilities of the Austrians having had some success in Poland at any rate; and still further discredits the rumors about yr. A. D. John. — There was also received to-day, the Prague Gazette; giving the Austrian account of the battles up to the 22nd.: — the tone of which makes it probable that the French bulletins have gone beyond their usual limits in exaggerating. It admits advantages of the French; and claims other advantages for the Austrians; but does not anywhere speak in the tone of men defeated to the extent stated by the French. Indeed, Bonaparte's own proclamation — telling them that he will be in Vienna in a *month* (why not 10 days?) — proves *that*, I think. — But here in London everybody is so besotted with admiration of Bonaparte and 'the talents' of French generals — that no one thinks of detecting contradictions etc. in French accounts. Yesterday, none of the papers could see any reason for suspecting the credibility of a French account which, in one paragraph, described the Austrians as universally panic-stricken and scarcely making any resistance — and, in the next but one after, spoke with spite against them for defending Ratisbon — so desperately — and fighting from house to house. All the papers that I saw were 'afraid that there was too much truth in its statements' etc. — Oh! that Bonaparte had these fellows! — And then they think to make amends by scribbling away now and then some vile stuff about 'our inveterate foes.' — 'the disturber of society!' — 'the merciless adversary!' — 'The murderer of the Duc d'Enghien' — and by way of climax, insinuating that he has no great respect for the law of nations. — How the Courier talks, I do not know, as I seldom see it: but, as a farmer told my Liverpool acquaintance that his paper was 'grown too Foxy by half for him' — so, the Courier was always too Canningy by half for me; and lately I hear everywhere that it is too Castlereaghy by half. I am sure that it has given great disgust by the defence which I hear that it has made for Castle-reagh — representing his attempt to purchase a seat with a writership as nothing more than the ordinary borough traffick. On this account I was quite sorry to recollect that the *Courier* stands in the 1st. page of the Preface;<sup>1</sup> scarcely any paper, among the rational ones, having (I am sure) less the reputation of being an *impartial* paper. The *Times* seems to me the only really impartial paper; and, for ability, certainly ranks (in the public estimation here) far beyond all the rest: wisdom it may not have much more of than the others; but I must say that —

<sup>1</sup> Of the Cintra pamphlet.

for a barrister's address in managing an argument, neatness of language, etc. — I see nothing near it among the Daily papers. . . . 3 o'clock. My dear Madam, — I have just been to the Courier office: — I have the great joy in telling you that, as I sate with Mr. Stuart, a messenger came in and told him that the Austrian Bulletin had just arrived — and that all is true: — The Archduke John HAS DEFEATED THE FRENCH: AND TAKEN SIX THOUSAND PRISONERS: WITH BEVIES OF GENERALS! — oh! Jubilate!

At least twice a week De Quincey sent papers and pamphlets on the great conflict which might interest the Grasmere family. He himself, of course, was absolutely *au courant* in order that he might keep the Cintra pamphlet in line with the latest progress of the war. So De Quincey was reporter and editorial writer extraordinary to the Wordsworths.

He commented on the portraits of the generals which he was constantly seeking to send back to Grasmere — of men of affairs engaged in the great drama. It was hard to find 'which are the authorized portraits, for they all profess to be so, and yet they are very little like each other.' (March 28.) This applied especially to Sir John Moore, but was, none the less, of general application. De Quincey was glad to find a portrait of Palafox; he sent on one of Mrs. Clarke, then much in the public eye; of Sir D. Baird; of Sir Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington. Of Wellesley's portrait he said: — there is only 'one sumptuous engraving at the expense of the family; this seems to prove that, in spite of all the base sycophancy and fawning of the House of Commons, he is no favorite of the people; and as to this picture — which is no doubt a very good likeness — I can vouch that it contains a plenary justification and indemnity for the severest things that can have been said of him in the pamphlet: the rudiments of wickedness lie in his features: there is a bill of indictment — with at least a billion of counts — in his mouth alone: if I was a despotic prince, I would not hesitate a moment to hang any man who owned such a face — without any questions.' <sup>2</sup> (March 5.)

<sup>2</sup> He admits in the letter of May 25, that because of his short-sightedness, he had really not seen the engraving of Wellesley clearly; and that he must, upon closer examination, reverse his judgment as to the viciousness of the face.

## II

NATURALLY enough, being in London, De Quincey offered to execute commissions of one sort or another. Were there any presents which Dorothy might want him to buy? London was the place for bargains—the place for anything! When Dorothy refused the kind offer—she had no money to spend on gifts—he replied:—‘About making presents—what I meant was—that 1st. *everything* is to be had in London: and 2ndly. that most things may, by looking about, be had cheaper. To prove the first point—I need only mention that, when I first came up to London, there was stuck up (at the lower end of the street on which I live) a bill advertising “Artificial Ears”:—at first I thought—on reading no more of it than this—that this was some banter on gentlemen who had been so unfortunate as to forfeit theirs to the law:—but afterwards I found that it was seriously an offer to furnish delicate people with false ears for everyday use—especially in cold weather: the real ears to be brought out only on gala days and grand occasions. As to the 2nd. point, much of the apparent cheapness is no doubt imposition:—but still there is so much competition, there must (I should think) be something real in it:—as most trades, I should think, could afford (if they chose) to reduce the price of their wares considerably by contenting themselves with a more moderate profit. One trade, I am sure, could:—for I have experimentally learned lately that for 20 guineas laid out in a proper way you may buy as many books as at shops would cost 70 or 80 guineas at the least.’<sup>a</sup>

He was at any rate going to buy presents for his Grasmere friends even if Dorothy had no money to buy them for *her* friends. In the letter of May 25, a very long one which, written just after the pamphlet was finally off the press, is full of relief and of gaiety, he has one delightful passage. Allan Bank, as every Wordsworthian knows, was so built under woods and rocks that the chimneys—especially the dining-room chimney—smoked persistently. ‘However, as you would not commission me to buy presents,—I have ventured

<sup>a</sup> May 25; GW. MSS.

to buy one myself as my offering to Allan Bank: and I hope most heartily that it will prove a fortunate one. It is a patent *Smoke-Dispenser*: which I have long meditated to buy: and since the Pamphlet is published, I have had leisure to enquire about it. I did not go at all "greenly" to work about it: for, after I had made enquiries elsewhere, I asked the man of whom I bought it — how many possible causes there were in his opinion, for a chimney's smoking: because then I should be able to tell whether his specific would cure my patient: — whereupon he entered upon a very elaborate nosology and therapeutics — of chimnies: and before he had gone very far he got to class the 5th. — subdivision the 1st. "*Standing under a hill.*" "My dear friend," — I said — "that's the very thing: — but will your smoke-Dispenser cure it?" — And then he assured me most solemnly, and upon the honor of a Patentee, that it would: — and, more than this, that it would cure *every* disease in chimnies — except one — viz. the 3rd. species of the genus — "Original Malformation" — namely, too great narrowness of draught. — Upon this assurance I have ventured to buy one by way of trial; and shall send it off to-morrow or the next day; for, if unfortunately it should fail at Allan Bank, it may do for a present to somebody in Rydale — where they told me at the post, every house smokes. But I hope it will not fail; for I should be very happy if, through my means, your long trouble and vexation from this cause should have an end.' The Smoke Dispenser was received; but whether it worked to cure the 'disease' history saith not.

Among the commissions given him by the Wordsworths was one to be fulfilled by De Quincey's pen. At the very time when the delay of the pamphlet was almost beyond endurance, when Wordsworth was feeling wrath in his heart, Dorothy, presumably with Wordsworth's consent, turned to De Quincey for help. In the letter of May 1<sup>4</sup> she told of having read in the latest number of the *Edinburgh Review* an article on Burns's poems — or rather, of reading the last part of it, which, she naïvely said, 'was, in fact, all I thought it worth while to read, being the only part in which my brother's

works are alluded to' — and found it unexampled as 'a compound of despicable falsehood, malevolence and folly.' Of course, she continued, one should not notice such criticisms, but when the author quotes from poems which are not Wordsworth's at all, something should be done. And she suggested that De Quincey write a reply to Jeffrey through the Edinburgh paper and one or two London papers. To this suggestion De Quincey replied on May 10, 'The note to Mr. Jeffray [sic] I will gladly write; and shall put my name to it — that it may not be possible for anybody to suppose that Mr. Wordsworth has ever honoured him and his dull malice with any notice.' The idea lay fallow for a time; but as soon as the pamphlet was off the press, on May 25, he reverted to it and enlarged his plan. He looked up the review in the February number of the Edinburgh magazine; 'it is contained in the space of a single page; and is so utterly despicable as to make it impossible for anyone to give it the honour of any public notice; and for this I am sorry; for I propose, in order to escape the construction which may be put on giving Jeffray a separate and peculiar notice, to collect a few of the most flagrant misrepresentations in the principal reviews, and thus put Jeffray to greater torment by shewing that he is not recognised as having any special claims even to infamy. I cannot express to you how disgusting an employment it was to turn over the pages of this senseless review, and to see that in the very same number in which the vilest trash, written by milliners about Miss Seraphinas and Lord Fredericks, is thought worthy to be gravely and solemnly analysed and quoted, and commented upon — only a few lines from the Happy Warrior are extracted from Mr. Wordsworth's Poems, and the whole dismissed by the conceited wretch who, without being able to write a line of sense or grammar, has undertaken to *review* them (as they call it), with an intimation that really the author must reform before he can hope to appease the *severity of critics*!! Miserable puppy! that thou wert but of importance enough to justify a man in destroying thee! Job says — "Would that my enemy had written a book!" — meaning, I suppose, that he would have reviewed him: — but *I* say, "Would that he had reviewed a book with common

sense! — that there might be an argument for crucifying him.” Yet the criticism did not get written, although ten years later De Quincey reverted to it.

## III

PERHAPS the most amiable, the most delightful side of De Quincey's character is seen in his devotion to the children which permeates the letters. Their attraction for him was balanced by his attraction for them. His 'gentle, sweet manners,' his quiet voice, his pleasant eyes and smile, his genial humour — perhaps his small size — all combined to charm the children; and the family recognized his genuine love for them. Wordsworth himself had time to record, in letters concerned with national immorality and peninsular campaigns, 'I am happy to say that Thomas is quite well, and growing handsome,' or 'John is getting by heart the ballad of *Chevy Chase* and promises himself great pleasure in repeating it to you.'<sup>5</sup> Dorothy and Mrs. Wordsworth wrote whole paragraphs — among the most delightful of the entire correspondence — devoted to one or another of the youngsters. Thus on 10 March 1809: — 'When your friend Johnny came from school last night, his mother said to him, "Here is a letter from —." "From," he replied "Mr. De Quincey?" and with his own ingenuous blush and smile he came forward to the fire-side at a quicker pace, and asked me to read the letter. . . . When all was over he said, "But when will he come? Maybe he'll tell us in his next letter."'<sup>6</sup> A mouse had been seen in the dining-room grate. When Johnny came home from school to find another letter from De Quincey in his aunt's hands, he asked, "'Have you told him about the mouse?" and he begged me to read to him what I had said.'<sup>7</sup> Three months later: — 'Johnny improves daily; he is certainly the sweetest creature in the world; he is so very tender hearted and affectionate. He longs for your return, and I think he will profit more than ever by your conversation, though great was the improvement that you wrought in

<sup>5</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 413, 447.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 396.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 397.

him; indeed he owes more to you than to anyone else for the softening of his manners.' <sup>8</sup>

But it was not only Johnny who loved the young man. There was Catherine, the one whom De Quincey loved best of all. Mrs. Wordsworth wrote in August, <sup>9</sup> 'You have no need to be apprehensive that [Catherine] will forget you' — she had not seen him since the preceding February, and she was then less than six months old! <sup>10</sup> — 'though I believe I am a much more formidable rival to you than before you left us, for at one time she was obliged to be constantly with me, and nothing was done for her by any other person; this has made her a most intolerable mother's pet, and I most earnestly wish you were at home, were it only to wean her from me a little . . . She still looks sharply round when your name is mentioned.' And again, 'C. went through every room in the cottage [Dove Cottage] the other day to seek you.' <sup>11</sup> And, 'You can well conceive with what interest and pleasure we all (children and all) look forward to, and talk of, the visits we are to make to you when we have you placed at the Town End.' <sup>12</sup>

On De Quincey's side, there were constant inquiries, expressions of delight at news of the children, thought of them in presents bought or planned. There were many messages to 'dear Johnny'; e.g., 'I meant to have sent a message to my dear friend Johnny; but cannot find room.' (March 11, March 14, etc.) De Quincey was much concerned at Totty's having the measles. 'Dear little Totty! I am very sorry for him, and hope anxiously that your next letter will give a better account of him.' (March 21.) 'To-night (March 25) I will endeavour to write something that may amuse even dear little Tottses.' On May 29 he sent a special letter — carefully printed — to Johnny which 'gave joy to the house.' On April 1: 'I grieve for sweet little Catherine. Pray do not omit to let me know how she goes on. I am very glad to

<sup>8</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 466.

<sup>9</sup> *Mems.*, I, 210.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine was born on 6 September 1808. (G. W. Harper, *William Wordsworth*, II, 171.)

<sup>11</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 474.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 453.

hear of Totts's recovery; but as for his *growing handsome*, I think Totts has reason to complain, for I always thought he was very handsome before.' Such items could be quoted almost endlessly; they recur strangely sandwiched in between errors of printers and complaints of delay; but they were always present.

De Quincey did not stop there. He wished Johnny were with him to see the whale below London Bridge; he wished he were with him at Westhay in August to play with two little girls who were visiting his mother. 'I have often regretted since I left Grasmere, that I had not my beloved friend John with me: but never so much as here [Westhay]: for besides the beautiful woods and fields, we have here on a visit to my mother, two little girls — 9 and 7 years old — who are very amiable and would make excellent play-fellows for him; and my youngest brother is within three miles of us and is over almost every day. There is another recommendation at this time — viz. a little white pony, the most elegant and gentle little creature that ever was seen.' (July 7.) In London he hunted for pictures and books as gifts for the children. Thus on May 25: 'You will find in the parcel, 2 primers — which are for Totts: Johnny of course would think such a present an affront; — and Catherine, besides that she is far off wanting them yet — sweet little love! — is to be taught by nobody but *me*: this promise Mrs. Wordsworth once made me: and therefore I shall think it an act of highest perfidy if anybody should attempt to insinuate any learning into Catherine — or to hint at primers — to the prejudice of my exclusive privilege.<sup>13</sup> — I hope my sweet pupil, that is to be, goes on well; though you have not said lately. Whether you make use of these things for teaching the letters, I do not know — nor whether Totts will approve of learning his letters from them; but I thought he would like the pictures at any rate; and therefore selected the gayest I could find.' Here he had been more than usually successful in finding appropriate presents; for again and again, in looking for pictures for Johnny, he deplored that he could not find anything suit-

<sup>13</sup> Do we not recall in the Coniston sketch of *Constituents of Happiness* that one of the items was 'The Education of a Child'?



able; and at least once, he hoped that Johnny would not be by when the parcel was opened, for there was nothing suitable to him and he would be disappointed.

## IV

ANOTHER subject of recurring interest in the letters, is the preparation of Dove Cottage, or Town End, for De Quincey's occupancy in anticipation of his return to Grasmere in the coming autumn. Before he had left for London, as already mentioned, he had decided to take the house from which the Wordsworths had removed to Allan Bank not so very long before; and the ladies had undertaken to oversee the preparations—a generous offer involving a good deal of labour on their part. On March 10—De Quincey had left on February 20—Dorothy wrote, 'We have taken [the cottage] for six years.'<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact, De Quincey held it for twenty-five years, until 1834, long after he had removed himself and his family to Edinburgh.

The problem of furnishing was left almost entirely to Dorothy. It was her suggestion that the furnishings, curtains, and the like, should be purchased in Manchester; and the Kelsall firm was called on to provide. She had a free hand, with slight suggestions. 'There are only two things which I have any especial affection for in furniture,' De Quincey wrote on March 11, 'viz. the colors of *pink* or *white* in bed-rooms; and only one which I especially hate, viz. *stuff* in bed-hangings: which I mention not as things worth attention; but that, if your choice should be evenly balanced between something that is and something that is not *stuff*, there may be a motive to decide you. I was never thoroughly reconciled to my bed-room in Oxford: because the bed was hung with a Tawdry yellow stuff or something of that kind.'

Dorothy also engaged a servant for him, no other than Molly Dawson who had formerly lived with the Wordsworths and was at this time a cook for the Charles Lloyds, who were living at Low Brathay, not very far away, and who were to become De Quincey's very dear friends. She was to come at Martinmas. Dorothy worried over the 'color and pattern

<sup>14</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 396.

of the calico for bed-curtains,' etc., and wished that they had chosen the materials themselves in Kendal. She feared that the poor laurels in the garden had been so mauled by the carpenter that they would 'never look like anything but dismembered creatures.' But things progressed; and on May 5, 'in less than a fortnight, all will be ready for the painters.' There was delay in receiving the carpet which was to be sent from Oxford but which had been forgotten.<sup>15</sup> The new furniture was of mahogany; the book-cases of deal. The books were *en route*. Yet after all, there proved to be no hurry. His return was postponed and postponed until November. Throughout, all the preparations for the home-coming were cheerfully carried on.

## V

LONG after the pamphlet was published, De Quincey lingered in London; but for other reasons than his usual procrastination. His brother Pink had arrived and needed help. On March 11 De Quincey wrote to Grasmere: 'I have just heard from my sister that she has a letter from my brother, dated Feb. 17th. fm. on board the Superb off Gottenburgh: — he was in hourly expectation of his exchange arriving; and we have since seen that the Superb is on her way home.' It was not, however, until May 24 that Pink actually reached London. 'My brother is at length arrived in England: very much broken down by 6 years of hardships, and 18 months' imprisonment, with bad food, etc., among the Danes: — I was sauntering home on Thursday night last through Greek St., thinking of a passage I had been reading at a bookseller's where I had been sitting in the neighbourhood — when, by accident, my way was stopped by 2 men whom I, from having my thoughts occupied should not have noticed; but in our efforts to get past each other, I got planted directly opposite

<sup>15</sup> He seems to have held his rooms in Oxford until December 1810. There exists a letter of 8 December 1809 from De Quincey (Worcester College, MSS.) in reply to one from the Rev. F. H. Brickenden of Worcester College. Brickenden had written that De Quincey owed the college on February 25, £20, 12s. The long delayed reply acknowledged the debt; but since the debt during the intervening months had '*considerably increased*,' De Quincey asks Mr. B. to draw for the whole amount due, whatever it might be, upon his account with Mr. Kelsall.

to one of them who stared a moment and then cried out — in a voice that shook all Soho — Mr. Quincey, I am very happy to see you! The voice made me know that it was Mr. Kelsall — the husband of your Manchester correspondent <sup>16</sup> — to whom my brother had written as being the most stationary person known to him; and who had accordingly immediately come up to London to meet him. . . . My stay in London is a little lengthened on my brother's account.'

The situation was a curious one. Richard was ill of some disease which had troubled him long, debilitating not only to body but to mental faculties as well; 'every feeling is dulled except a sense of pain and sorrow which retain their first strength.'<sup>17</sup> And until he should recover, he refused to see any of his family — even Thomas — although he corresponded with Thomas, Mary, and his mother. Early in June he left London for Liverpool for the benefit of sea-bathing. Meantime, he asked Thomas's help; he begged money, inquired the name of a good dentist since his 'teeth, thanks to the mercury, are most of them decaying,'<sup>18</sup> and above all sought advice as to books to read, as to the value of studying German, etc. Meanwhile, Mrs. Quincey conceived the idea, not without some apparent evidence, that Richard was not really Richard, at all; but an impostor seeking to obtain Richard's patrimony. It was all very strange and involved.

De Quincey lingered on into July, even after Pink had left for the north. He was free to go, but he could not get started. 'I found myself with 2 or 3 hundred books, etc. which I had collected, to pack up: here began my delay: for I am so miserable at the thoughts of anything of this kind — that I keep putting it off from day to day — sometimes, as in this case, for weeks together, and am wretched the whole time.' (7 July 1809.) But leave he finally did for Westhay, where his mother was now living, and there he lingered on to see his brother who did not arrive there until about September 10, 'after an absence from home of more than seven years.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I.e., Mrs. Kelsall, through whom Dorothy had purchased the furnishings for Town End.

<sup>17</sup> *Mems.*, I, 252.

<sup>18</sup> BS. MSS.; incorrectly quoted in *Mems.*, I, 257.

<sup>19</sup> GW. MSS. 30 September 1809.

## VI

DE QUINCEY's health during the months in London was, on the whole, good. He had occasional pains to be sure. On April 15 he wrote to Wordsworth: — 'I have . . . been very unwell ever since Good Friday,' a week before, when a sudden cold spell had brought on all his old neuralgia; he had had 'only one uninterrupted night of rest since then; and being obliged to put cotton soaked in laudanum into my mouth at times to allay the pains which run round the whole circuit of my teeth, I have at times unavoidably swallowed a good deal, which has much disturbed my head.' <sup>20</sup> A month later he was passing a miserable week from toothache. There was no mention, naturally enough, of his regular doses of opium, but there can be no doubt of their continuance, and the aches were certain to have induced more than usual.

There was, however, a sudden awakening to a physical shortcoming of which he had never been fully aware before, namely, his extreme short-sightedness. 'I have lately discovered,' — he is writing on May 25 — 'to my great mortification and surprise, that I am very near sighted. I never had any reason to suspect this until the last day of my being at Grasmere; <sup>21</sup> when Mrs. Wordsworth, after taking a great deal of pains to direct me, could not make me see Johnny and his school-fellows in the field near the church. But the other day, in shewing my Manchester acquaintances about London, I was quite thunderstruck to find that, when we were standing in Guildhall under the statue of Alderman Beckford, they could both *read* with the greatest ease an inscription where I could but dimly perceive that there *was* an inscription: — and even, going back many yards to a distance at which I had lost sight even of the obscure haze made by the letters, they could still read it fluently. Afterwards I had many proofs that my sight for slight differences at a distance must be very defective; but gross differences, as in woods and mountains, etc., I seem

<sup>20</sup> April 15, GW. MSS.

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Jacox reports a conversation more than forty years later in which De Quincey 'spoke of his short-sightedness, which at Oxford had been so marked that he was rumoured to be a bit of a Jacobin because he failed to "cap" the Master of his college (Worcester) when he met him, only from sheer inability to recognise him by sight.' (Page, I, 394.)

to see as well as others. They both comforted me a little by saying that near sightedness is considered a proof of the strength and durability of the sight.'

It seems strange that he could have reached the age of twenty-four without having realized this short-sightedness. But the fact of his defective vision in some part explains certain of his characteristics; for example, his almost complete ignorance of the details of nature, his indifference to scientific things which he confesses; perhaps, indirectly, his love of night wandering during the Grasmere and Edinburgh years; even his extreme bookishness, his inwardness, his fondness for the abstract. To push the implications too far is dangerous, yet it is not fantastic to see in his handicap an influence of wide scope. His eyes were on the whole strong, even if, at one time or another, owing to particular causes, they troubled him. To the end of his days he read without glasses.<sup>22</sup>

## VII

IN spite of his occupation with the pamphlet and his brother in London from February to July, he had much spare time. Part of this he used in hunting for books. But in his quests he found little sympathy from the Grasmere family. In his second letter he wrote of 'having been all yesterday . . . much engaged in a long chace, and a very successful one, after books.' There was no response, and he expressed his regret. He kept off the topic henceforth for the most part. But on May 25 he returned to a chronicle of his searches. 'I have in vain endeavoured, my dear Madam, to awaken some interest in you about my successes in book-hunting: first, I think, I told you that I had bought Lord Brooke's other works (viz. his Posthumous Poems: — and his "5 Years of King James; or the State of England etc. and the relation it had to other

<sup>22</sup> George M. Gould in *Biographic Clinics* (London, 1903) offers an interesting theory that much of De Quincey's ill-health was due to eye-strain. To the lay mind, although one suspects that Dr. Gould urges his theory too far, the suggestion seems worthy of serious consideration.

One of the periods when his sight was seriously threatened was in August 1809. On the 16th he wrote to Dorothy that he had been unable to write from inflammation of the eyes, 'which I dare say had come on before I wrote to you last,' namely, July 7; for a time the 'dimness' increased so that he feared loss of vision. 'I was more dejected than I ever was before in my life.' The matter cleared up after some weeks. (GW. MSS.)

provinces," a prose work); next, I think, I told you how I had made your State Trials worth more than 20 guineas by finding the 11th. vol.: and, I dare say, many other triumphs I must have recorded: But still "no applause ensued": not an atom of sympathy did I receive: else you should have heard further how I bought Spenser's own edition of the Faery Queene; how I had nearly made up a set of Milton's Prose works in his own corrected editions (which will enable the Grasmere Press to issue a better edition of Milton's whole works than has yet been given): how this very evening I met with Mr. Wordsworth's "Descriptive Sketches among the Alps," which for so many years I have sought in vain: how, if Mr. Heber by the strength of his purse had not prevented me, I should have bought a book (*Les Delices de la Suisse*) with Milton's M. S. notes on the margin: how I have a chance of buying, etc. — all which, with "many things of worthy memory, now shall be in oblivion." But he could not resist going on to rejoice over two books of Lord Brooke's, unknown to him before, which he had found; and a work on Episcopacy by 'the other Lord Brooke (not Fulke Greville, but Robert).'

There was still another side of his London life, namely, the human side. It was none too gay. In that huge letter of May 25 he spoke of his loneliness, of an 'oppression' of which he had not hitherto written: '3 months' solitariness through the whole of my evenings: for the only acquaintances which I have in London (I mean who are sufficiently intimate to permit me to visit them on the only terms which could make it not a pain — that is, when I like and without dressing) are and have been the whole time — in the country: and the tribes of coffee-house acquaintances, whom I make at dinner — some of them ask me to their houses; but I have never, except in two instances, accepted their invitations; because that would oblige me to tell them my name; which I have never at any time felt ready to do to any coffee-house acquaintance: and *now* it would be particularly injudicious as it would expose me to visits from hundreds of loungers at the lakes — who might learn at Ambleside etc. that an acquaintance of theirs lived near the eccentric Mr. Wordsworth; and thus Town End

would be all "the rage" for a season. For this reason, excepting 2 evenings or (I forget which) spent at an Oratorio and a concert, every night since I left Grasmere has been spent in utter solitude: which I have tried to relieve as much as possible by varying times and places of my walks; but, after all, it is a doleful burthen . . .' He was between twenty-three and twenty-four, when a normal youth would have naturally sought companionship with his kind; yet we find Thomas De Quincey living practically alone in the city of London for six months.

## CHAPTER XI

### GRASMERE

1809-1817

#### I

**I**N THE summer of 1809 De Quincey was unable to get himself out of London; and while we may smile at his procrastinations as thoroughly De Quinceyan, we must not forget that he was at this time entirely free from all external compulsion to do anything definite, either for himself or others. His was a life of dilettantism. He was, undoubtedly, playing with the idea that sometime he should perform some great work for the welfare of intellectual mankind, and was preparing for it by thought and reading in a vague way, perhaps writing notes; yet he felt no pressure of time or fortune, confident in a long future of ease and happiness, which present circumstances warranted him in believing to be reasonably certain.

At last, about July first, he went westward to Wrington, where his mother, with Colonel Penson, was just moving into a new house, named 'Westhay,' reminiscent of the 'Greenhay' of Manchester days. There, with all his family assembled — his mother, sisters, uncle, and at last his brothers — he spent two months or more with domestic satisfaction. De Quincey was always attached to his family; and the old frictions of his minority caused by violent assertions of independence had by this time faded into the background. Whatever disapprobation might still have lingered in his mother's mind, there seems to have been outwardly nothing to mar the family reunion. Indeed, there was an unusually cheerful atmosphere, induced by the excitements of the completion of the new house and the imminent return of Richard. As for Thomas himself, he was uplifted by the feeling that he had successfully seen Wordsworth's pamphlet through the press; by his vigorous assumption of the role of missionary for the defence of the Spaniards, in whose cause he conducted lively



conversational campaigns; and, not least, by his support of *The Friend* against many detractors, in which he was loyally seconded by his mother. He set forth the scene in the following letter to Mrs. Wordsworth:

Saturday, September 30th. [1809]  
Westhay, near Wrington.

My dear Madam,

Within a day after you receive this letter perhaps, I shall be at Grasmere. You will wonder indeed why I have not been there long ago: much delay has, according to custom, been occasioned by my own intolerable procrastination — which, having made me miss opportunities which I had in one week of finishing matters of business and paying visiting debts that had accumulated during my residence here, has forced me to stay the next for that purpose; this has brought with it fresh debts of its own — and so on. But, however, I should at any rate have stayed much longer than I first talked of — in order to see my brother the sailor who did not come to us till yesterday three weeks — after an absence from home of more than seven years. His stay here has occasioned so much visiting, etc. that I have never had one day since his arrival which I could call my own; and thus has rendered it impossible for me to write a letter long enough to travel 300 miles.

This neighbourhood has but small attractions for me in its society: we know almost everybody round about us; but they are all wretched creatures in my opinion; — hostile to the Spaniards to a man — even to rancour; and all batten on the *Edinburgh Review*: I have accordingly tormented them to the utmost of my power — and have the satisfaction of thinking that I have given extreme pain to all the *refined* part of the community here. With respect to the Spaniards, my knowledge of the events of the two campaigns (which I have brought to as much accuracy as anybody can — who was not personally engaged in them) has put it in my power to gain an easy triumph in every conversation; and my hatred of the intolerable spirit of misrepresentation and selfishness which appears in all that these men say of Spain has so barbed my words, I hope, as to inflict no little misery upon many of them.

It would scarcely be believed that in respect to the battle of Talavera in particular — not even Wellesley's admission that the Spaniards 'did their duty' — nor my seventy-times repeated admonishment to them that in that battle we were *attacked* and that therefore it rested with the French to choose who should bear the brunt of the action (even in which choice pri-

vate accounts say that the French were determined by *the nature of the ground*) — has had weight enough to make them forbear repeating that *there* we received a lesson to teach us how little the Spaniards are to be relied upon as allies; indeed that wicked calumny which was published in almost all the newspapers before the Gazette account contradicted it — viz. that the Spaniards had been drawn off by Cuesta before the battle began — shewed sufficiently what it was predetermined should be said of the Spanish — and how much lying was to be received — rather than that the nation should be called upon to renounce one tittle of its selfishness in behalf of any nation but the worst.

Among others Mr. Cottle is a perfect zealot in his hatred of the Spaniards: the *expression* of it was first drawn out by my having lent him Mr. Wordsworth's pamphlet to read: or rather *that* had served to accumulate his bile; for the immediate occasion which called it out, I recollect, was his sister's having observed to me upon the battle of Talavera — 'What a sad pity — that so much blood has been shed' etc. Whereupon I, instead of the expected assent, assumed a most Catonic severity — and told her that a far better thing for the English nation than the restoring to life all that had died would in my mind be the restoring a little of the spirit which taught the old Lord Talbot to say 'that he would not exchange his dead son for any living son in Christendom.' Mr. Cottle had kept the peace till now; but this he took for a defiance; and immediately there was a grand explosion of venom against the Spaniards and all who were so 'unchristian' as to defend throat-cutting: however *they* had the worst of it; for nearly at the close of the debate I recollect Mr. C. said — 'But really you're so furious, there's no talking with you.' The religious magazines, I believe, have all taken part against Spain: certainly that in which Wilberforce dictates — ('The Christian Observer') has most violently. Blessed fruits their 'Gospel knowledge' produces!! —

Sunday, October 8th. Westhay. . . : I was interrupted by a visitor; and have never found time to go on till now. — My trunks are packing up — and therefore I shall certainly go on Tuesday. — We have received the *Friend* regularly from No. 4 to 7 inclusively; and to-day we hope to have No. 8: I have understood, I believe, almost the whole; and have been much instructed by many parts: the only complaint we make here is — that, *besides* the intricacy and weight of the thought, there is some other cause that makes it difficult to read a series of passages as 'a fluency' (to quote Mr. Wordsworth) — or so at least to give them the full effect of *eloquence*. I have lent them where it was likely that they could be understood; and have

endeavoured to expound to Wrington understandings such passages as I imagined that I comprehended myself: — but the *flattering* complaint is still made — that '*they are so obscure.*' *Flattering* I call it; for considering what manner of stuff it must be that men idolatrous of Hannah More would call plain and good, it sounds music to me to hear one of my friends accused of obscurity; and when I hear them say it is obscure, I am ready to cry out with joy — But do you really think so, my dear fellow? I hope you're not flattering!

As to Hannah More, having mentioned her — I was going to describe her at length: but, besides that I do not think you would be much interested in anything related to her, she has described herself sufficiently in her books — if you ever looked into any of them: her conversation (for *that* she thinks her forte) is just like them — aphoristic: epigrammatic — nothing been thought to be said well at Barley Wood but what is said pointedly; — full of trite quotations — hardly ever introduced to confirm — or illustrate — or because they might adequately convey the feeling — but as cold ornaments and garnishings; or, when she does sometimes make a formal quotation in proof of what she says, it is always — for fear of being thought 'a learned lady' — ushered in with an affectation of doubt as to the author — as 'I think, it is my Lord Bacon who says' — etc. Then everything must be 'improved'; as, if Westhay stand on low ground — and Barley Wood on a hill — then 'what a benevolent dispensation of *Providence* it is that when there were but 2 pieces of land to be sold in the valley for so many years, *that* should have been put up for sale when the old wanted to purchase which made it unnecessary to climb hills for a walk — and on the other hand, when the young who could climb hills wanted to purchase, *that* only should have been to be had which made it necessary for them to take the exercise necessary for health before they could find any good walks.' Moreover she is restless until every thought is brought into such a shape that she can translate it into some of her received positions; and thus every avenue is shut up against gaining or communicating anything in her company; since, if she finds that the case is desperate and that you will not permit what you say to be lopped down into some of her previous thoughts, then she makes no further answer but by bowing her head. — On the whole, her house would be the very dullest place I was ever in (since generally everybody thinks it a duty to sit silent until she has some literary anecdote or formal sentiment to offer) — but for the endless succession of visitors (for one fortnight lately 3 families on an average a day from distant parts, as they told me) — and but that, as all the 5 sisters know everybody of any celebrity in the last age, I always draw one of them into an

account of Louisa the lady of the hay-stack — Edmund Burke — Garrick — Mrs. Montague and her society — Dr. Johnson etc. —

To pass from the lady to her book — what would you guess that she had got by her last work *Coelebs*? She told me several weeks ago that within the 1st. 8 months from its publication there had been published 14,000 copies — at 12s. each — out of which she cleared 3s. a copy; making *then* a clear profit of 2100£ — A few days ago we heard that a 12th. edition had been called for!! — I am indignant at this; though I never got farther than 40 pages in the book; but is it not a disgrace to the nation?

I see on looking back, that I have omitted the best thing that can be said of her — viz. that she is very courteous in her manners — so far as she can be so, not being benevolent; but then I had also omitted the worst thing — viz. that she is, as you know, a horrid bigot — censorious — and greedy of flattery to any amount under cover of a frequent disclamation of all merit — and with all the forms and phrases of profound humility.

Monday, October 9th. — This afternoon we have received the *Friend* — No. 8 — (only *one* copy, by the way, tho' the cover says *two*). We have all been greatly interested with it; and upon the whole I believe it is liked better than any preceding one here: — we are all a little surprised, and very greatly delighted, to find that the *Friend* goes on so regularly: — I wonder how the *soi-disant* metaphysicians of Edinburgh have made their way through the philosophy of two or three numbers; and how it is *generally* received. I forgot to extract before, for your amusement, the following anticipation of its reception from a letter which was forwarded to me from Grasmere soon after I left it for London: it is a fair specimen of Oxford eloquence — coming from a Master of Arts who is esteemed a clever man: 'He (i.e. Mr. Coleridge) will have to repel equally the arrow of criticism — the dagger of envy — the bludgeon of calumny — and the (broad-) sword of literary persecution.' I confess to have added the word *broad* as it seemed to be necessary to the climax and the music: but the rest is correct. —

If you have seen Mr. Wilson since I wrote to him, you have heard that I have consented to go to Spain: I promise myself much benefit in many ways from this scheme; I am afraid, however, that I cannot conveniently be ready in less than 4 weeks from this time: however this can be settled when I get into Westmoreland. — Before I conclude, I must thank you for your goodness in writing — tho so short a letter — from Elleray: <sup>1</sup> I have been necessarily very long in answering it; but Grasmere has not the less for that been in all my thoughts, night and morning: . . . <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth Family Letters, I, 477.

<sup>2</sup> GW. MSS.

De Quincey had been doing his best for Coleridge ever since he left Grasmere. In a letter to Dorothy on March 21 he wrote: 'I have obtained about  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen prosp[ectuses] from Mr. Stewart [Stuart] — and hope to do something before I leave Town; but at present, I have not had time or opportunities to do more than to send 2 or 3 accruing on proper stations; and I did not think it just to Mr. Coleridge to seem always *prepared*, even when I had an opportunity, like a hawker of lottery bills.' His prospectuses, however, went 'accruing' to good purpose. He appealed to his Liverpool friends, the Merritts and Wrights; he obtained no less than seven subscribers from Worcester College, whose names he sent on to Dorothy. Meantime he moved his mother and sisters to work among *their* friends; Mrs. Quincey took out four subscriptions in her own name. And when he reached Wrington, as the letter tells, he became an active agent there.<sup>3</sup>

In August he ran off for a day or two to visit Thomas Poole at Stowey, and being so near Alfoxden he made a pious pilgrimage to that shrine of true Wordsworthians; partly moved by his own enthusiasm, partly to be enabled to report on the old place to the family at Allan Bank. Armed with a letter from Poole to Mr. St. Aubyn, the owner, he set out; but Mr. St. Aubyn was away and he could not gain access to the house. 'But,' he wrote on August 16, 'the outside I went all round and over: — that beautiful wood and glen — the park — the old paling — the deer — in short everything out of doors — had no marks of change upon them; and I dare say were just as you left them.'

De Quincey went to Stowey at a moment when his eyes had long been troubling him so that he even feared loss of sight.

<sup>3</sup> His interest in *The Friend* obliged him to make complaints as to delays and mismanagement. On August 16 he writes that his mother 'has seen only the 1st. No. as yet, and that I was obliged to borrow from Mr. Cottle; for not one No. has ever been sent to her though her name was down before any other in Bristol.' Shepherd of Bristol, who manages the distribution there, is negligent, to say the least; 'for about a month ago, my mother being in Bristol, called at his shop — and was told that the work was discontinued.' But then No. III appeared eight weeks late, so that Shepherd had some justification.

'The complaint [of irregularity] has been made very often in my hearing — and sometimes very angrily by persons who (I afterward found) *were not subscribers*. . . But no one, it seems to me, has any right to complain that he does not receive a No. regularly once a week — so long as he is not required to pay a shilling once a week.'

But he found Poole very busy 'in writing petitions, memorials, etc. and in making interest by every avenue within his knowledge to obtain the pardon of Robert Blake — a young man of Stowey — aged 23 — who was found guilty of forging a £10 Bank of England note . . . and left for execution.' Poole had obtained one respite; but to gain a pardon meant much pressure. De Quincey, ever eager to lend a hand, turned to and helped, even though he knew, and experience proved, that his eyes would suffer badly. Then when he left Stowey, he undertook 'to obtain Hannah More's intercession with one of the ministers.'

So the days passed. It was not until after the middle of October that De Quincey finally left Wrington for Grasmere.

## II

'IN November, at last, I, the long expected, made my appearance. Some little sensation did really and naturally attend my coming, for most of the draperies belonging to beds, curtains, etc. had been sewed by the young women of the adjoining vales. . . . Even the old people of the vale were a little excited by the accounts (somewhat exaggerated, perhaps) of the never ending books that continued to arrive in packing-cases for several months in succession. Nothing in these vales so much fixes the attention and respect of the people as the reputation of being a "far learn'd" man.' <sup>4</sup> Certain it is that he came with all the implements of a 'far learn'd man,' for Dorothy Wordsworth reported to Mrs. Clarkson on November 19, 'You may judge of the number of his books when I tell you that he has already received nine or ten chests, and that nineteen more are on the road. Some of these books must be kept in chests, on account of the smallness of the house.' <sup>5</sup> Those of us who know the tiny cottage to-day, may well agree that the library was 'far too large for the house'; but as Dorothy observed — and her remark certainly proved true — the library 'will be a solid advantage to my brother.' And she might have added to Coleridge, also; for — and here De Quincey speaks — 'Many of my books being German, Coleridge borrowed them in great numbers. Having a gen-

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, II, 367.

<sup>5</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 481.

eral license from me to use them as he would, he was in the habit of accumulating them so largely at Allan Bank . . . that sometimes as many as 500 were absent at once.' <sup>6</sup> The books still continued to come. As late as 26 April 1810 there were still three large boxes to be forwarded from Clifton.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, so long as De Quincey had any money he continued to add to the numbers.

De Quincey seems to have arrived in Grasmere on October 21 or thereabouts <sup>8</sup> and at once took possession of his cottage as a lodging place; 'and our little orphan Sally Green,' — Dorothy Wordsworth is speaking — 'has prepared his breakfast — but wanting a house-keeper he grew tired of that place and has of late been wholly with us . . . and is almost like one of the family.' <sup>9</sup> He stayed on with the Wordsworths until November 18.

The Wordsworths received De Quincey back with open arms after the strain of the pamphlet. Not only had he been taken in at Allan Bank as a guest out of kind sympathy for his discomforts; but the Wordsworth family visited him. 'We have already spent several comfortable evenings at the cottage; ' 'on Christmas day we are all to dine there, and to meet Mr. Wilson and a friend of his,' are phrases from Dorothy's letters.<sup>10</sup> Such details show better than anything else the atmosphere which prevailed in the new period of his becoming householder at Town End. Yet to illustrate still further the complete adoption of De Quincey into the Wordsworth family life, here is an unpublished note to him from Dorothy, written from Elleray a year later when the family had gone thither to escape from some sort of epidemic in the vale.

Saturday.

My dear Friend,

If any letters should be at Ambleside pray direct them to us here. Tell Sarah, if you please, that we shall send on dirty linen by the next carrier, which she must wash and return to us, directed to be left at Charles Stuart's, Orrest Head. Sarah

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, II, 191.

<sup>7</sup> *Mems.*, II, 70.

<sup>8</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, I, 480.

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson, Brit. Mus. MSS. Molly Dawson was not engaged to appear until after Martinmas, November 11.

<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact De Quincey and the Wordsworths spent this Christmas of 1809 with Wilson at Elleray.

must put up as much butter as will last us a week and send it in a pot and continue to do so till she hears from us. We shall probably stay at least a fortnight longer. The carrier waits — excuse haste — I wish we had a bed for you — at all events we shall hope to see you. God bless you.

Yours truly,  
D. Wordsworth.

Pray charge the carrier to bring our Parcels on to Orrest Head, for an old man who has brought my things has come all the way from Ambleside with them. I hope you are better. Pray write. Give our love to Sarah and tell her to take good care of herself. If Sarah can get yeast she must bake a week's Bread and send it.<sup>11</sup>

### III

THERE was every reason, then, why De Quincey should have looked forward to an indefinite era of happiness. He was surrounded by friends. The Wordsworths were his neighbours; the Lloyds were within easy walking distance at Brathay; and John Wilson lived only nine miles away at Elleray. Wilson first swam into his ken during the preceding winter as a gay young man at some dances at Lloyd's; but not till later did they become intimate. One day in the winter of 1808-9 De Quincey opened the door into the little room at Allan Bank, still full to-day of memories of the great men who used it, in quest of a book, and found Wilson seated in earnest conversation with Wordsworth. He was a young man of twenty-one or two, 'in sailor's dress, manifestly in robust health — *fervidus juvenâ*, and wearing upon his countenance a powerful expression of ardour and animated intelligence, mixed with much good nature. . . . Figure to yourself, then, a tall man, about six feet high, within an half an inch or so, built with tolerable appearance of strength, but at the date of my description (that is, in the very springtide and blossom of youth) wearing, for the predominant character of his person, lightness and agility, or in Westmoreland dialect, *lishness*'; an athlete, if there ever was one, florid, vivid. He was a strange physical contrast to De Quincey, a reason, perhaps, why there grew up between them the friendship which soon ripened. But there were other characteristics which also attracted De



Quincey: the humility and gravity with which Wilson spoke of himself, his large expansion of heart, and a certain air of noble frankness which overspread everything he said; an intense enjoyment of life but without arrogance.<sup>12</sup> Wilson stayed on at Allan Bank for a week, and naturally the young men, both worshipping with a sort of awe the older poets, were thrown much together. All we know is that early in 1809, before De Quincey left for London, Wilson had asked him to take a long walk with him to Penrith by way of Kentmere and Hawesdale, and if possible to continue with him by coach to Glasgow and Edinburgh.<sup>13</sup> The walk came off as far as Penrith. Later, in the summer, while De Quincey was still at Wrington, there came to him a vague proposal that Wordsworth, Wilson, and he should take a walking tour in Wales. Then Wilson asked him to go to Spain.

This plan is interesting for more than the sign of friendship which it indicated between the two men. De Quincey was full of the Spanish situation. Wilson was looking for excitement where it was to be found. Wordsworth, who was staying at Elleray during the contemplation of the plan, warmly encouraged it, and urged Wilson to write to De Quincey, then in Wrington, on the subject; he was evidently eager to have first-hand reports from the Spanish peninsula. The plan was for the young men to go by packet to Lisbon in October; and De Quincey eagerly caught at the proposal.<sup>14</sup> But when Coleridge was consulted by De Quincey, he wrote a long letter of caution. The plan of the trip was wrong, Coleridge made clear. Three gentlemen and servants — the third gentleman was to have been an Englishman, a former fellow student of Wilson's at Glasgow — were not likely to get close to the people nor to learn the language; and the dangers from the conditions of the country and the possibilities of permanent injury to health counselled delay, at least. The journey was abandoned — the only one that really promised to take De Quincey out of Britain during his life. A vague plan to go to Germany in 1813<sup>15</sup> was apparently but an aspiration.

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, V, 262 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Gordon, '*Christopher North*,' a *Memoir of John Wilson*, Edinburgh, 1862, I, 154.

<sup>14</sup> GW. MSS. to Mrs. Wordsworth, 30 September 1809.

<sup>15</sup> GW. MSS., 3 July 1813.

The intimacy with Wilson was one of De Quincey's satisfactions during the following years. There was interchange of visits and dinners; there were long walks together on a footing of easy and friendly comradeship. There is no better proof of this intimacy than the fact that when Wilson, who had been considered, and who had considered himself, affluent, fell upon hard days, it was to De Quincey that he turned as the one friend to whom he could confide his troubles. This happened in the spring of 1813, at a time when unknown to Wilson De Quincey was himself in straitened circumstances. In a note of May 1813 Wilson wrote: — 'When you so kindly offered your assistance on our walk t'other day, my acceptance of it to my mind seemed impossible. The shortness of our acquaintance renders it difficult for me to think that I can have any right to request or accept such a mark of kindness and regard, and, further, I have some doubt of the *justice* of availing myself of your benevolent disposition, or of that friendly feeling you may entertain towards me. . . . But your kindness suggested the relief; and when I contemplate the idea I have of your character, I venture to speak thus to you; it being the first time that I have ever spoken it to any friend.' <sup>16</sup> In short, he needed £200 until Christmas when he should be able to repay it. De Quincey's immediate reply contained the following sentences: — 'Having made my offer to you the other day in perfect sincerity, I am truly happy to learn that you have determined to accept it. . . . I am proud that you allow me so confidential a place in your friendship; and, in the midst of my sympathy with you under your misfortunes, am glad that they have furnished me with an occasion for testifying (though by so trifling a service) that I am not unworthy of it.' <sup>17</sup> In the somewhat dignified interchange of courtesies of an elder day, there was undoubted mutual respect and attachment. One point is to be emphasized, and it is this: — it was characteristic of De Quincey to make the proposal to help his friend in need.

De Quincey had come to know Charles Lloyd on his first visit to the vale in 1807, when he and Dorothy Wordsworth, after a rainy walk, stopped at Old Brathay and saw not only

<sup>16</sup> *Memls.*, II, 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Memls.*, II, 32.

Lloyd himself, but his Sophia, both in the middle twenties, a young couple of fine culture and great charm. The man's qualities attracted De Quincey; there was a subtlety and refinement in Lloyd's conversation entirely sympathetic. 'He was a man never to be forgotten!' De Quincey wrote much later. 'He was somewhat *Rousseauish*: but he had, in conversation, the most extraordinary powers for analysis of a certain kind, applied to the philosophy of manners, and the most delicate *nuances* of social life: and his translation of "Alfieri," together with his own poems, shows him to have been an accomplished scholar.'<sup>18</sup> He was unconscious of his gifts and eminently shy, except in the atmosphere of complete friendliness; to such an extent, indeed, 'that neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge ever suspected the amount of power which was latent in Lloyd.'<sup>19</sup> The qualities which De Quincey's own peculiar characteristics seem to have brought out drew the intimacy close. 'Often and often,' wrote De Quincey, 'upon the darkest nights, for many years, I used to go over about nine o'clock, or an hour later, and sit with him till one.'<sup>20</sup> The fact that it was Charles Lloyd of whom De Quincey wrote perhaps the most sympathetic of his sketches proves how genuine was his feeling for his unfortunate neighbour;<sup>21</sup> and their friendly intercourse, which lasted until the tragedy of Lloyd's disordered mind broke up the family at Brathay, made a large contribution to the pleasanter side of De Quincey's life at Town End.

Then there were more distant friends and acquaintances. There was Southey, hospitable and kindly, but too reserved and formal to appeal strongly to the young Opium Eater. Yet we hear of walks together;<sup>22</sup> and an exchange of visits, as when, in December 1810, Southey spent two nights with De Quincey.<sup>23</sup> Southey furnished letters of introduction at De

<sup>18</sup> *Works*, II, 201.

<sup>19</sup> *Works*, II, 391.

<sup>20</sup> *Works*, II, 383.

<sup>21</sup> We have a few slight notes which entirely confirm the intimacy: a note, for instance from De Quincey, sending over his maid servant, Molly Dawson to meet some need of the Lloyds'; one proposing to walk over later in the day; another about exchanging books, or making an engagement for dinner. (BS. MSS.)

<sup>22</sup> *Works*, II, 345.

<sup>23</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson, Brit. Mus. MSS.

Quincey's request for a young acquaintance bound for Portugal and Spain in 1813; <sup>24</sup> and De Quincey looked for books for Southey while in London.<sup>25</sup> There was, in short, through all the years up to 1817, friendly contact between the men, although in no sense could they be called friends. At Calgary lived Bishop Watson, at whose house De Quincey was now and then seen with Wilson. There was an occasional invitation to dinner at Rydal Hall; but De Quincey had no close associates apart from the Wordsworths, Coleridge, Wilson, and Lloyd.

## IV

DURING these years De Quincey was hospitable. He not infrequently had his close friends to dinner. Mary Dawson was a good cook; so good that De Quincey's sister, after a visit, recalled with enthusiasm her brown bread and delicious mashed potatoes, and Mrs. Quincey was eager to have her at Westhay if Thomas should cease to need her services.<sup>26</sup> In September 1814, his Liverpool friends, Mr. and Mrs. Merritt, stopped at Grasmere for a few days on their return from Keswick where De Quincey had looked in upon them; <sup>27</sup> and he summoned Wilson to meet them and to plan an excursion into Wastdale. 'He can't walk ("damn his body," as he says), but I think I can get a horse for him from Allan Bank.' De Quincey entertained a M. Simond and party, the guests of a Mrs. Millar and the Wordsworths.<sup>28</sup> But perhaps the most exciting of all his entertainments, was the long-deferred, much-prepared-for visit from his mother and his two sisters, who had long been dying of curiosity to see Thomas's *ménage*, his house and garden, the glorious Lake country, and his literary friends. The visit came off in the autumn of 1811, the planning having gone on busily since early spring — indeed, from the year previous; and it lasted a month.<sup>29</sup>

It was a great success; the girls and even Mrs. Quincey, were delighted; and the memories were glowing. Poor Mary returned to Westhay to come down with a serious fever; <sup>30</sup> but

<sup>24</sup> *Memls.*, II, 103.

<sup>25</sup> *GW. MSS.*, 3 July 1813.

<sup>26</sup> *Memls.*, II, 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Memls.*, II, 38.

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, II, 376 ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Memls.*, II, 14 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Memls.*, II, 79.

the anguish of it was mitigated 'with most lively visions of particular scenes in your sweet country,' she wrote. 'Once during my illness I was at Watendlath. . . . And I have walked with Miss Wordsworth through Tilberthwaite on the beautiful winding road which charmed us so much.' — Dorothy was obviously all kindness to De Quincey's relatives. Wordsworth was not behind in attentions, for on the very morning of their departure he presented the ladies with some roots of the *Osmunda regalis* for Westhay; and he advised as to planting fruit trees on the lawn and ornamental forest trees where fruit trees would not grow. Mary in her letters begged Thomas to remember the Quinceys all most affectionately at the Vicarage, where the Wordsworths were living at the time. Mrs. Quincey was delighted with the children, especially with little Thomas Wordsworth. Yes, the visit was a success from all points of view.

Society, however, was not, nor could it have been, De Quincey's chief concern. Books and exercise, study and walking, must have filled the major part of his waking time.

## V

EXERCISE was to him at this period a necessity; and hatless he walked far through snow and rain. Especially had he discovered the charm of walking by night. He frequently tramped to Old Brathay in the evening, five miles going, and five miles coming. We hear of his returning the thirteen miles from Keswick at nine o'clock of a winter night. 'I took the very greatest delight in these nocturnal walks through the silent valleys of Cumberland and Westmoreland; and often at hours far later than the present. What I liked in this solitary rambling was, to trace the course of the evening through its household hieroglyphics from the windows which I passed or saw: to see the blazing fires shining through the windows of houses, lurking in nooks far apart from neighbours; sometimes, in solitudes that seemed abandoned to the owl, to catch the sounds of household mirth; then, some miles further, to perceive the time of going to bed; then the gradual sinking to silence of the house; then the drowsy reign of the cricket; at intervals, to hear church-clocks or a little solitary chapel

bell, under the brows of mighty hills, proclaiming the hours of the night, and flinging out their sullen knells over the graves where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet slept" — where the strength and the loveliness of Elizabeth's time, or Cromwell's, and through so many fleeting generations that have succeeded, had long ago sunk to rest. Such was the sort of pleasure which I reaped in my nightly walks — of which, however, considering the suspicions of lunacy which it has sometimes awoke, the less I say, perhaps, the better.' <sup>81</sup>

De Quincey was still restless and uncertain in his movements, unable to settle down in one spot — and he still procrastinated. He tells us that through these years he was away from Grasmere a quarter of the time; and as one checks up on his statement one finds that it is not exaggerated. He was always planning to go to London or Westhay — next week, next month; and the move was always postponed. The reader of his letters *begins* by putting faith in phrases like this: — 'I leave London next Tuesday'; or, 'I shall be in Grasmere on September 3.' But one soon learns to distrust; one comes to accept the mention of a definite future date as, *ipso facto*, an untrustworthy prophecy. De Quincey's family and friends twitted him with his irregularities; he himself admitted the charge, and smiled at his own reliance on a sliding future. Thus Jane, the lively, wrote: 'Your case affords a melancholy example of the degree of moral turpitude which, by continued habit, a man may learn to contemplate with composure. I can't help laughing in my heart to think of the believing sailor [Richard] who has absolutely resolved to stay in London in the *Ignis Fatuus* hope of seeing you. He may wait long enough, I suspect.' <sup>82</sup> And Dorothy Wordsworth in a letter to Mrs. Clarkson, apropos of having some one 'puff' a volume of Wordsworth's poems, perhaps the *White Doe*, wrote with decision: — 'Mr. De Quincey notwithstanding his learning and his talents can do nothing: he is eaten up by the spirit of procrastination: but if once in two or three years he actually does make an effort, he is so slow a labourer that no one who knows him would wish to appoint him to it, if it might not as well be 3 months in hand as 3 hours; though in itself but the

<sup>81</sup> *Works*, II, 325.

<sup>82</sup> *Memls.*, II, 22.

work of one sitting for another person.' <sup>83</sup> But procrastination did not mean complete inertia; for De Quincey sometimes suddenly, if unexpectedly, stirred to action. While no one could tell, least of all himself, when he would go or when he would come, go and come he did in his own time. <sup>84</sup>

## VI

FOR at least three years, from 1812 to 1815, De Quincey had a legitimate reason for going to London. Before his Oxford days he had refused to commit himself to a profession, believing himself sufficiently well off financially to lead a scholar's life without help of professional income. When his patrimony fell to him on his twenty-first birthday, the feeling of comfort if not opulence, led him further towards contentment with the life of a gentleman scholar. But with the dissipation of his resources came need of earned income. When in 1810 the prospect of poverty began to loom, law became a possible necessity in contemplation. But he never at any time had real interest in the law. In 1812 <sup>85</sup> he was in London with legal intent.

On 16 April 1812, De Quincey wrote to Wordsworth, 'I called on Dr. Stoddart the Monday after I arrived in London' — he left Grasmere on March 22. <sup>86</sup> — 'He was friendly and communicative; so that I got all the information that was necessary to me in forming a judgement on Civil Law as a profession: indeed quite enough to make me anxious for no more. — I have now determined to enter Gray's Inn; and, as a preliminary, have written down to my College for an attested account of the number of terms which I kept at Oxford: to expedite which and for other purposes, I am on the point

<sup>83</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. 11 April [1815].

<sup>84</sup> London had a constant appeal for him. He was three months there in the summer of 1810. (GW. MSS., 16 November 1810.) There are no records for 1811. In 1812, he was there twice, from March to June and from August to, perhaps, January 1813; in 1813, from May to August; in 1814 from February to September. These are not certain intervals; for example, the period from February to September, 1814 may have been broken by a return to Grasmere; but there is no doubt as to his general movements. There are records of a walk through Wales in 1815 (*Works*, III, 335n.), and visits to his family at Wrington.

<sup>85</sup> Japp is quite wrong in saying that he studied law in 1809. (Page, I, 143.)

<sup>86</sup> GW. MSS., 21 June 1812.

of going down to Oxford. I shall be up again, of course, in time to keep the Easter term at Gray's Inn; which point is accomplished, as perhaps you know, by masticating for three days in the Hall of the Honourable Society.' He had had enough of Civil Law before he began his studies! He was to enter Gray's Inn — which he did not do! As a fact he was entered in the Middle Temple: — 'June 12, 1812, Thomas De Quincey, eldest son of Thomas De Quincey of Green Hay, Lancashire, Esq., dec'd.' That is all the Middle Temple records show. There are only two or three other references to his legal studies. In 1813 he was keeping Trinity term.<sup>37</sup> In 1815 he went south again to study law;<sup>38</sup> and in 1818 he was planning at the end of the year 'to remove finally to London for the prosecution of [his] profession as a lawyer.'<sup>39</sup> There it all ends.

Another absence from Grasmere also has its interest. In 1815, in the midst of besetting poverty, ill health, and love, De Quincey was induced by Wilson to go with him to Edinburgh, where he spent some delightful weeks and became acquainted with the literary circles of the Athens of the North. This visit proved to be the prelude to long association with Edinburgh so that, when he returned thither in 1820 for a short time and still later permanently, he found a considerable number of acquaintances awaiting him.

In his paper on Sir William Hamilton, De Quincey tells of his meeting some of the literary lights of the day. He already knew John Wilson's brother, James, the naturalist. Now he met Sir Walter Scott, Sir William Hamilton, Colonel Mitchell, the biographer of Wallenstein, Captain Thomas Hamilton, the brother of Sir William, known as 'Cyril Thornton,' from the title of his novel, Sir William Allen, the artist, later President of the Royal Scottish Academy, Mr. R. P. Gillies, the advocate, John Gibson Lockhart and most of the writers for Blackwood.<sup>40</sup>

It is from this visit that Gillies draws in his *Memoirs of a Literary Veteran* a portrait of De Quincey.

<sup>37</sup> GW. MSS., July 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Mems.*, II, 115.

<sup>39</sup> GW. MSS., 14 April 1818.

<sup>40</sup> *Works*, V, 322; Garnett, p. 193.



' His voice was extraordinary; it came as if from dream-land; but it was the most musical and impressive of voices. In convivial life, what then seemed to me the most remarkable trait of De Quincey's character was the power he possessed of easily changing the tone of ordinary thought and conversation into that of his own dream-land, till his auditors, with wonder, found themselves moving pleasantly along with him in a sphere of which they might have heard and read, perhaps, but which had ever appeared to them inaccessible, and far, far away! Seeing that he was always good-natured and social, he would take part, at commencement, in any sort of tattle or twaddle. The talk might be of "beeves," and he could grapple with them if expected to do so, but his musical cadences were not in keeping with such work, and in a few minutes (not without some strictly logical sequence) he could escape at will from beeves to butterflies, and thence to the soul's immortality, to Plato, and Kant, and Schelling, and Fichte, to Milton's early years and Shakespeare's sonnets, to Wordsworth and Coleridge, to Homer and Eschylus, to St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Basil, and St. Chrysostom. But he by no means excluded themes from real life, according to his view of that life, but would recount profound mysteries from his own experiences — visions that had come over him in his loneliest walks among the mountains,' — very likely the visions of little Kate Wordsworth, which we shall see — ' and passages within his own personal knowledge, illustrating, if not proving, the doctrines of dreams, of warnings, of second sight, and mesmerism. And whatsoever the subject might be, every one of his sentences (or of his chapters I might say) was woven into the most perfect logical texture and uttered in a tone of sustained melody.

' Such powers and acquirements could not fail to excite wonder at Edinburgh. He had, indeed, studied "all such books as are never read" in that enlightened capital, and was the first friend I had ever met who could profess to have a command over the German language, and who consequently was able (*ex cathedra*) to corroborate my notions of the great stores that were contained therein. I flatter myself that he found our house not altogether uncongenial, as he was kind enough to visit there more frequently than in any other.' <sup>41</sup>

Lockhart met De Quincey at a dinner at Hamilton's; and in a letter of 29 November 1815 Lockhart wrote of him as 'a most strange creature'; and went on to describe how 'after dinner he set down two snuff-boxes on the table; one, I soon observed, contained opium pills — of these he swallowed one

<sup>41</sup> Gillies, *Memoirs*, II, 219 f.

every now and then, while we drank our half-bottle apiece. Wilson and he were both as enthusiastic concerning the "Excursion" as you could wish.'<sup>42</sup> De Quincey was a great unknown, as it were; Wilson had spread abroad his own enthusiasm for him and De Quincey by his conversation had justified Wilson. As Gillies remarked, 'by his friend he was regarded as a powerful author,' although 'he had not, so far as I know, published a single line. . . His various literary compositions written in his exemplary hand (the best I ever saw, except Southey's) on little scraps of paper, must have reached to a great extent, but in his own estimation they were by no means "ready for the press"; like an over-cautious general he withheld his fire, and remained *multa et pulchra minans*'; — and he continued so to remain until after his second visit in 1820.

## VII

GRASMERE was, after all, his home; there were his books. He was reading; probably writing fragments later to be used in developed essays: but our information is singularly scanty. From his twenty-third to his thirtieth year, he gives no tangible signs of scholarly or literary expression. He tells us in his later reminiscences, 'In the year 1810, I happened to be amusing myself by reading in their chronological order, the great classical circumnavigations of the earth.'<sup>43</sup> About 1811 he was studying Danish.<sup>44</sup> 'In 1812 . . . as well as for some years previous, I have been chiefly studying German metaphysics in the writings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, etc.,' he wrote in the *Confessions*.<sup>45</sup> His constant studies brought from his irreverent brothers and sisters jesting references to his occupation. Henry asked for 'some account of the Grasmirian affairs, how many hundreds you have received for metaphysical works.'<sup>46</sup> There is really nothing in the line of definite information as to the point upon which his mind was focusing. He does say in the *Confessions* that he had devoted the labour of his whole life to one single work, 'De Emendatione Humani Intellectus';<sup>47</sup> and he implied that it was the

<sup>42</sup> A. Lang, *Life of Lockhart*, I, 97.

<sup>43</sup> *Works*, II, 145.

<sup>44</sup> *Works*, X, 60n.

<sup>45</sup> *Works*, III, 397.

<sup>46</sup> *Memls.*, II, 151.

<sup>47</sup> *Works*, III, 431.

main concern of these early Grasmere years. But there is no likelihood that he got beyond speculating upon something in the vague future. There is nothing, in short, to indicate any definite direction of his mind towards a sharply defined object.<sup>48</sup> The financial stress was not yet strong enough to force him to writing for a livelihood.

## VIII

IN October 1809 Coleridge wrote him a letter in regard to the proposed journey with Wilson into Spain; and in the course of it he said: 'It gave me great pleasure to see how much stronger you seem. Your constitution is evidently strengthening, and with care and regular Exercise, I have little doubt but that in another year you will have left all complaints behind you, and will have muscularized into as much steady good health and strength as a man, who thinks and feels as much as you, can expect.'<sup>49</sup> We have noted the buoyancy of spirits that on the whole prevailed in the spring of 1809. He went to Grasmere with delight to settle into congenial surroundings, free from galling cares. But there had been bad tooth-ache even in the spring of 1809, with its incidental overdoses of opium; and tooth-ache was always hovering ready to pounce upon him.<sup>50</sup>

In the summer of 1812, came the deaths of little Kate and Thomas Wordsworth. The shock to De Quincey was intense and prolonged, 'a torment absolutely indescribable, under which,' he wrote, 'I felt assured that life could not be borne. . . I was under the possession of some internal nervous malady, that made each respiration which I drew an act of separate anguish.'<sup>51</sup> It finally passed away, but in the summer of 1813, there came an aftermath, the recurrence of his terrible London sufferings in 1802, before he had tasted opium;

<sup>48</sup> Yet in a note in his *Collected Edition*, he speaks of some translations from Richter which he had made in 1811, and which, under pressure, he used in the *London Magazine* in 1821. (Quoted by Masson, *Works*, XI, 273n.)

<sup>49</sup> *Memls.*, I, 143.

<sup>50</sup> We hear of it for a whole fortnight, or more at a stretch in November 1810 (GW. MSS. 16 November 1810). It recurs in late January 1811 and in March (Brit. Mus. MSS. D. W. to Mrs. C. 28 January; De Q. to Wordsworth, March 3). We hear of it again in May 1813 (*Memls.*, II, 33). Evidently we have not a complete list of attacks: but the recurrence was certainly real.

<sup>51</sup> *Works*, II, 444.

just as his tooth-ache was a recurrence of pains which he had had early at Oxford. Such attacks upon a man who was in the habit of taking opium made an increased use of the drug inevitable.

For the growing use of the opiate we must turn to the famous passage in the *Confessions*. It is 1812. 'And I still take opium? On Saturday nights. And, perhaps, have taken it unblushingly ever since "the rainy Sunday," and "the stately Pantheon" and "the beatific druggist" of 1804? Even so. And how do I find my health after all this opium eating? in short, how do I do? Why, pretty well, I thank you, reader. In fact, if I dared to say the real and simple truth (though, in order to satisfy the theories of some medical men, I ought to be ill), I was never better in my life than in the spring of 1812. . . . To . . . moderation and temperate use of the article I may ascribe it, I suppose, that as yet at least (that is, in 1812) I am ignorant and unsuspecting of the avenging terrors which opium has in store for those who abuse its long-suffering. At the same time, as yet I had been only a *dilet-tante* eater of opium; even eight years' practice, with the single precaution of allowing sufficient intervals between every indulgence, has not been sufficient to make opium necessary to me as an article of daily diet.

'But now comes a different era. Move on, then, if you please, reader, to 1813. In the summer of the year we have just quitted I had suffered much in bodily health from distress of mind connected with a melancholy event [the death of little Kate Wordsworth]. Whether the illness of 1812 had any share in that 1813, I know not; but so it was that, in the latter year, I was attacked by a most appalling irritation of the stomach<sup>52</sup> . . . and accompanied by a revival of all the old dreams. Now then it was — viz. in the year 1813 — that I became a regular and confirmed (no longer an intermitting) opium eater.'<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> De Quincey in the opening pages of his revised *Confessions* reiterates again and again that he traced the origin of his confirmed opium eating to a necessity growing out of his sufferings in the streets of London — physical ill, and above all 'misery,' 'blank desolation,' 'settled and abiding darkness' (*Works*, III, 231 ff.)

<sup>53</sup> *Works*, III, 397.

He then proceeded to emphasize the fact that it was not 'by the easy and gradual steps of self-indulging persons, from the first to the final stage of opium eating,' that he advanced; rather it was by the sudden inability to wrestle any longer with irritation and constant suffering. 'I could resist no longer. . . At the time I began to take opium daily, I could not have done otherwise.'<sup>54</sup> In such sentences does he exculpate himself from the moral obliquity of soft self-indulgence; but at the same time by implication he admits that the weekly opium draughts of Saturday nights during the preceding eight years *were* merely self-indulgences, not necessitated in any way by physical suffering. He began the use of it as relief from pain; he still continued it legitimately, now and then, when tooth-ache attacked him. During some of these years also when his sensitive temperament was overcome by melancholy or misery, he used opium as a relief from sheer depression of spirits. But if he took the drug for pleasure, he assures us that he was no worse than those who drank wine for a sense of well-being or smoked cigars to quiet the nerves. In those early days of his use of opium, from 1804 to 1812, he was unaware of the dangers lurking in it. It was friendly in pain and in misery. But now came the physical crisis which demanded the help of opium to make life, not momentarily easier, but at all endurable; and the continued suffering, with its demand for constant alleviation, fastened upon him a habit which never, so long as he lived, was quite shaken off. 'And from this date [1813] the reader is to consider me as a regular and confirmed opium-eater, of whom to ask whether on any particular day I had or had not taken opium would be to ask whether my lungs had performed respiration, or the heart fulfilled its functions.'<sup>55</sup>

Of the next four or five years, until 1816 or 1817, we have little information. But we know from his own account that he rose in doses to the astonishing amount of 320 grains a day, i.e., 8000 drops of laudanum, about seven wine glasses;<sup>56</sup> and that profoundest clouds of melancholy rested upon his brain. Then in 1816, although we can only guess at the cause, by an exertion of the will, probably accompanied by an improve-

<sup>54</sup> *Works*, III, 399.<sup>55</sup> *Works*, III, 400.<sup>56</sup> *Works*, III, 401.

ment in health, the daily portion was reduced to 1000 drops; and 'instantaneously, and as if by magic, the cloud of profoundest melancholy drew off in one week; passed away with its murky banners as simultaneously as a ship that had been stranded, and is floated off by a spring tide.' <sup>57</sup> And there emerged the 'happiest year' of his life — 'a year of brilliant water (to speak after the manner of jewellers) set, as it were, and insulated, in the gloomy umbrage of opium. . . . Now, then, I was again happy: — a latter spring had come to close up the season of youth. My brain performed its functions as healthily as ever before. I read Kant again: and again I understood him, or fancied that I did. Again my feelings of pleasure expanded themselves to all around me.' <sup>58</sup> He emerged from his melancholy, he reduced his drug, and he was deeply in love — the presumably fundamental cause of the revival.

This was the apogee of his youth: he was in his thirty-first year.

## IX

BUT we must turn back to account for the physical collapse of 1813 and its consequences. The immediate cause was the death of the Wordsworth children, especially the death of Kate. Here was an emotional cataclysm which must be read in close comparison with the sorrow which seized him as a small child upon the death of his sister. His narrative of that childish loss might conceivably be taken as a mere imaginative exaggeration, but in the case of the death of the Wordsworth children we have preserved on the one side his own literary narrative, and on the other the actual letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth to De Quincey and of De Quincey to them. In these the literary account is completely supported; and we gain assurance that the 'Sorrows of Childhood' are probable and credible.

From Kate's earliest infancy, the attraction between her and De Quincey had been mutual; even as a baby 'she noticed me,' he wrote, 'more than any other person, excepting, of course, her mother.' <sup>59</sup> She was always a fascinating child. She was 'pronounced to be the "wittiest Bairn" of the lot,'

<sup>57</sup> *Works*, III, 402.

<sup>58</sup> *Works*, III, 402.

<sup>59</sup> *Works*, II, 441.

wrote Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson.<sup>60</sup> 'I cannot say the prettiest. She is indeed grown more pleasing, but there is something so irresistibly comic in her face and her motions that it is quite a feast to watch her.' And in another passage, she 'makes you laugh outright, though she can scarcely say half a dozen words, and she joins in the laugh, as if sensible of the drollery of her appearance. She is a plain child, has something peculiar in the cast of her face, which probably adds to the comic effect of her looks and gestures.'<sup>61</sup> The 'witchery' which everyone saw in her, Wordsworth has embodied in his poem *Characteristics of a Child Three Years Old*; De Quincey has described it thus: — 'This radiant spirit of joyousness, making solitude for her blithe society, and filling the morning air "with gladness and involuntary songs" — this it was which so fascinated my heart that I became blindly, doatingly, in a servile degree, devoted to this one affection.'<sup>62</sup>

In the early spring of 1810 came the painful incident of Catherine's eating raw carrots which threw her into convulsions; and while, to be sure, she recovered from them, her left side remained partially paralyzed.<sup>63</sup> The final tragedy was delayed for two years. 'In the spring of 1812,' wrote De Quincey, 'I went up to London; and early in June, by a letter from Miss Wordsworth, her aunt, I learned the terrific news (for such to me it was) that she had died suddenly.'<sup>64</sup> The letters which follow tell the story. They not only speak eloquently of De Quincey's deep grief; they also reveal the beautiful recognition on the part of the Wordsworths of De Quincey's devotion to the child and his oneness with them in their sorrow.

<sup>60</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS., 10 April 1810 — passage omitted by Knight, *Wordsworth Family Letters*.

<sup>61</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS., 28 February 1810.

<sup>62</sup> *Works*, II, 442.

<sup>63</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth gives an account of the incident in an unpublished passage in a letter to Mrs. Clarkson only partly printed by Knight in *Wordsworth Family Letters*. 'John and Dorothy were making Bullets of carrot for their [?] tree guns, as they call them, that is guns made of elder-tree. Sally set Catherine upon the ground to make their porridge and she picked up and swallowed these bullets. This, too, before breakfast, her stomach quite empty.' (Brit. Mus. MSS.) Compare De Quincey, *Works*, II, 441.

<sup>64</sup> *Works*, II, 443.

## Dorothy Wordsworth to Thomas De Quincey.

[June 1812]

My dear Friend,

I am grieved to the heart when I write to you, but you must bear the sad tidings. Our sweet little Catherine was seized with convulsions on Wednesday night. The fits continued till the morning, when she breathed her last. She had been in perfect health, and looked unusually well. Her leg and arm had gained strength, and we were full of hope. In short, we had sent the most delightful accounts to her poor mother. It is a great addition to our affliction that her father and mother were not here to see her in the last happy weeks of her short life. She never forgot Quincey. Dear innocent, she now lies upon her mother's bed, a perfect image of peace. This to me was a soothing spectacle after having beheld her struggles. It is an unspeakable consolation to us that we are assured that no foresight could have prevented the disease in this last instance; and that it was not occasioned by any negligence, or improper food. The disease lay in the brain, and if it had been possible for her to recover, it is much to be feared that she would not have retained the faculties of her mind. God bless you!

Yours affectionately,

D. Wordsworth.

We have written to my brother, and he will proceed immediately into Wales to impart the sad intelligence to my sister. You will be pleased to hear that Mary Dawson has been very kind in her attention to us. John has been greatly afflicted, but he has begun to admit consolation. The funeral will be on Monday afternoon. I wish you had been here to follow your darling to her grave.<sup>65</sup>

## Thomas De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth.

My dearest Friend,

Yesterday morning I received your letter with its bitter tidings. Oh that I might have seen my darling's face once again! Oh what a heavy increase of affliction to me and to her parents in this! what a bitter pang that we might not see her blessed face again. I parted from her in cheerfulness, and had no misgivings; but I cannot bear to think of this. My dear friend, — write to me as circumstantially as you can; it cannot add to your grief to do this; and it will be an inexpressible consolation to me. Particularly, her father and I wish to know where she is buried. Do not, my dear friend, omit anything that you remember.

<sup>65</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, II, 9.



I saw Mr. Wordsworth off on the Hereford Coach this day at 2 o'clock. He had deemed it best, with the advice of some friends — to write to Mr. Thomas Hutchinson to break the news to poor dear Mrs. W. He will write to you from Hindwell, if possible, so that you may receive his letter on Wednesday. He expects to be at Hindwell on Sunday morning.

God support Mrs. Wordsworth under her mighty affliction!

My dearest friend, God bless you! is the prayer of

Yours most affectionately,

Thos. De Quincey.

82 Great Titchfield St., Oxford St.

Friday, June 12th. 1812

I will write again tomorrow.<sup>66</sup>

### Thomas De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth.

My dear Friend,

After I parted with Mr. Wordsworth, I took a walk and left myself too little time to say all that I wished to you. But I told you all, I think, that you would be chiefly anxious to know; namely, that Mr. Wordsworth would be at Hindwell on Sunday, and would write to you immediately. His plan was, if he could gain Mrs. W.'s consent, to make short deviations here and there from the direct road; if not, to go directly home. By this time, poor afflicted Mother! she has heard of her heart-breaking loss: God grant her fortitude, and make her capable of comfort.

Mr. Wordsworth called on me an hour or two after <sup>67</sup> I received your letter; in the evening he was so kind as to come again, and sate some hours with me. We found some lightening to our anguish in comparing what has been with what might have been. As you have suggested, it is but too likely that if she had lived, it would have been to the perpetual sorrow of us all. But yet it remains true that we ~~had~~ had a blessing of our lives amongst us, and that the blessing is taken away. Effectual comfort for this thought there can be none, until long years shall have made her sweet image and all the circumstances that now surround her in our recollections dim and indistinct. My greatest consolation is that she must have lived a most happy life; excepting that grievous sickness in the whooping cough, she had no other trouble to disturb her happiness. Oh what a thought of comfort it is also that I was one of those who added to her happiness. What tender, what

<sup>66</sup> GW. MSS.

<sup>67</sup> Crab Robinson records, that on this day, June 11, 'I called with Wordsworth on a Mr. De Quincey. . . De Quincey burst into tears on seeing Mr. W. as if he had been the father.' *Blake, Coleridge, etc.* ed. Morley, p. 57.

happy hours we passed together! Many a time, when we were alone, she would put her sweet arms about my neck and kiss me with a transport that was even then quite affecting to me. Nobody can judge from her manner to me before others what love she shewed to me when we were playing or talking alone. On the night when she slept with me in the winter, we lay awake all the middle of the night — and talked oh, how tenderly together: when we fell asleep, she was lying in my arms; once or twice I awoke from the presence of her dear body: but I could not find in my heart to disturb her. Many times on that night — when she was murmuring out tender sounds of endearment, she would lock her little arms with such passionateness round my neck — as if she had known that it was to be the last night we were ever to pass together. Ah pretty pretty love, would God I might have seen thy face and kissed thy dear lips again!

Oh dear Friend — what a comfortable what a blessed faith is that of a Christian, who believes that no more changes will pass over us than may take away our frailties and impurities — of which sweet innocent could have none — and is assured that he shall meet and know again the child *as a child*, and his beloved *as his beloved*!

Monday morning, June 15th.

What goes before was written on Saturday: but being interrupted soon after I wrote thus far, I was obliged to keep my letter to this day — there being no post yesterday. I have written almost illegibly, I see, — having bad pens, and no way of mending them: but I hope you will be able to make it out.

I intend leaving London on Saturday night next: I long to be with you, and have no doubt that I shall be at liberty by that day. I shall reach Liverpool at furthest in the course of Monday — and shall leave it either on Tuesday or Wednesday morning. If you should have any occasion to write me, a letter put into the Ambleside post by Sunday night — addressed to the care of Mr. Merritt, No. 60 Castle St., Liverpool — will be sure to reach me. Let Mary Dawson know, if you please, how much I am obliged to her for her attention to you at this time. I hope she has had good health whilst I have been away; but I am afraid her spirits must have been much dejected since the news I sent her from Liverpool. I was sorry I could do so little to lighten her distress; but, as the case stood, it seemed to me that nothing could be done.

*What follows is only for yourself —*

I say that I am obliged to M. D.; and so I am; but indeed she owed everything she could do and much more as a fitting expression of the sorrow and contrition which she ought to feel

for the most unprovoked harshness of language and manner with which she used sometimes to speak to Catherine. But on this subject no doubt her conscience must have bitterly reproached her: and therefore I shall say nothing about it. I spoke to her frequently about this extreme unreasonableness of this behaviour; but, as her harshness was rather in the tone and manner of what she said than anything in the matter of it which I might cite and insist upon as a proof of what I charged her with, I had no other remedy than to take care that Catherine should not be left under her care; which she never was, except in one or two instances when I could not prevent it.

Four days have gone by since I received the heart-rending news; and my grief has been continually growing upon me, my mind being constantly employed in calling up before me the thousand incidents and little passages of merriment or tenderness in her life with which I was connected — and in retracing the whole history of our affection for each other. It was at all times a tender employment to me in solitude to go over her pretty sayings and actions; and much more so when I had been for some short time separated from her; but now it is moving to me almost beyond what I can bear to do this — when such a heart-breaking interest is reflected upon them by the thought that they were the sayings and actions of a child who was so soon to be taken from us.

On this day last week, then, this dear child was buried. I do not mourn that I was spared the agony of following her to the grave, though I would have given up years of life to have seen her again. One thing hurts me, when I think of this: I fear that the custom of the country would oblige you to let many idle gazers look at our darling's face after she was dead — who never gave her a look of love or interest whilst she was living. But you would not, I am sure, permit this if it could be avoided: only that, from your own exceeding tenderness and benignity, perhaps, you sometimes attribute too much depth of feeling to others. It must surely be affecting even to a stranger to think that some should have gazed upon her with no more emotion than the most unfeeling must have from the thought of an innocent child having departed to God, and that we who doated so passionately upon her — her mother, her father, and I should have been allowed to see her face no more! — God bless and comfort you, my dear Friends.

Most affectionately yours,  
Thomas De Quincey.<sup>68</sup>

## Thomas De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth.

Sunday evening, June 21st.

My dear Friend,

I thank you much for your long and most affecting letter. One passage in it troubled me greatly; I mean when you speak of our dear child's bodily sufferings. Her father and I trusted that she had been insensible to pain — that being generally the case, as I believe, in convulsions. But thank God! whatever were her sufferings, they were short in comparison of what she would have had in most other complaints; and now at least sweet love she is at rest and in peace. It being God's pleasure to recall his innocent creature to himself, perhaps in no other way could it have been done more mercifully to her, though to the bystanders for the time few could be more afflicting to behold. How much more suffering would she have had in a common fever from a cold; and what anguish to us all, if she had called upon our names in delirium — and fancied that we would not come to her relief! This I remember witnessing at my father's bedside on the morning when he died: I was but a child, and had seen too little of him to feel much at his death; but I was greatly affected at hearing him moan out to my mother a few minutes before he died — 'O Betty, Betty, why will you never come and help me to raise this weight?'

I was truly glad to find from your account of her funeral that those who attended were in general such as would unaffectedly partake (more or less) in your sorrow. It has been an awful employment to me — the recollecting where I was and how occupied when this solemn scene was going on. At that time I must have been in the streets of London; tired, I remember, for I had just recovered from sickness — but cheerful, and filled with pleasant thought. Ah what a mortal revulsion of heart, if any sudden revelation could have laid open to my sight what scene was passing in Grasmere Vale! On the night of June 3-4, I remember, from a particular circumstance, that I lay awake all night long; in serious thought, but yet as cheerful as if not a dream were troubling anyone that I loved! I think I heard the clock strike *five*: if so I must have been closing my eyes in sleep just about the time that my blessed Kate was closing hers for ever! Oh that I might have died for her or with her! Willingly dear friend I would have done this. I do not say it from any momentary burst of grief, but as a feeling that I have ejaculated in truth and sincerity a thousand times since I heard of her death. If I had seen her in pain, I could have done anything for her; and reason it was that I should; for she was a blessing to *me*, and gave me many and many an hour of happy thoughts that I can never have again.

You tell me to think of her with tender cheerfulness; but far from that dear friend my heart grows heavier and heavier every day. I have done what I could against this oppression of spirits; twice I have passed the evening with Mr. Coleridge; and I have often endeavoured to study. But after all I find it more tolerable to let my thoughts take their natural course, than to put such constraint upon them. But let me not trouble you with complaints who have sorrow enough of your own to bear — and to witness in others.

Yesterday I heard from Mr. Wordsworth and was grieved to hear of Mrs. Wordsworth's state of mind; but I knew it could not be otherwise. She would have borne her loss better, I doubt not, if she had been on the spot: as it is, this affliction would be doubly poignant to her — coming upon her just when her mind would be busiest with images of a delightful return to Grasmere and meeting again with her children. I think of her with the greatest compassion and love.

This afternoon — whilst I was putting my clothing and books into a trunk — I remembered that to-day was the 21st. of June — just a quarter of a year from the day on which I left Grasmere; for I left it on Sunday March 22nd. On this day thirteen weeks therefore I saw Kate for the last time. The last words which she said to me (except that perhaps she might call out some words of farewell in company with the rest who were present) — I think were these: the children were speaking to me all at once, and I was saying one thing to one and another to another; and she, who could not speak loud enough to overpower the other voices, had got up on a chair by which I was standing; and putting her hand upon my mouth she said with her sweet importunateness of voice and gesture — Kinsey — Kinsey; what a-bring Katy from London? I believe she said it twice; and I remember that her mother noticed the earnestness of her manner, and looked at me, and smiled. This was the last time that I heard her sweet voice and saw her sweet countenance distinctly; and I shall never hear or see anything so delightful again! Oh if I had known that it was to be the last!

I shall leave London not earlier than Tuesday, nor later than Wednesday. I have been detained in a way that I could not prevent. How soon I reach Grasmere — will depend on the accidents of meeting conveyances, etc. . . .<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Page, I, 167 prints this letter from a draft still among the BS. MSS. I give it from the actual letter among the GW. MSS.

Woodhouse records that De Quincey in conversation with John Taylor had referred to the death of little Kate Wordsworth, and mentioned certain premonitions of her death. 'On leaving his residence on a visit to London some time back' — he was speaking in 1821 — 'he had a presentiment that he should never again see a little child of Wordsworth, who was afflicted and had but the use of one of its sides.' And again: — 'One night, while he was

It is particularly interesting in the light of these letters written in the intense moment to re-read the account of his feelings in his reminiscences of 1840:

'Never, perhaps, from the foundations of those mighty hills, was there so fierce a convulsion of grief as mastered my faculties on receiving that heart-shattering news. Over and above my excess of love for her, I had always viewed her as an impersonation of the dawn and the spirit of infancy; and this abstraction seated in her person, together with the visionary sort of connexion which, even in her parting hours, she assumed with the summer sun, by timing her immersion into the cloud of death with the rising and setting of that fountain of life, — these combined impressions recoiled so violently into a contrast or polar antithesis to the image of death that each exalted and brightened the other. I returned hastily to Grasmere; stretched myself every night, for more than two months running, upon her grave; in fact, often passed the night upon her grave; not (as may readily be supposed) in any parade of grief; on the contrary, in that quiet valley of simple shepherds, I was secure enough from observation until morning light began to return; but in mere intensity of sick, frantic yearning after neighbourhood to the darling of my heart. Many readers will have seen in Sir Walter Scott's "Demonology," and in Dr. Abercrombie's "Inquiries concerning the Intellectual Powers," some remarkable illustrations of the creative faculties awakened in the eye or other organs by peculiar states of passion; and it is worthy of a place amongst cases of that nature that, in many solitary fields, at a considerable elevation above the level of the valleys, — fields which, in the local dialect, are called "intacks," — my eye was haunted at times, in broad noonday (oftener, however, in the afternoon), with a facility, but at times also with a necessity, for weaving, out of a few simple elements, a perfect picture of little Kate in the attitude and onward motion of walking. I resorted constantly to these "intacks," as places where I was little liable to disturbance; and usually I saw her

here [in London] he heard a dog howling dismally at his door, in the evening: it howled three times, and the Opium Eater with some curiosity waited to hear a fourth howl, but in vain; the dog passed on and was silent. . . . The effect was so vivid upon the Opium Eater's sensations that he at once began to consider which of all the persons he knew and loved might most probably be in trouble or dying at the time; and he thought that this child was the most likely one of whom he might expect to receive ill news. He waited with some anxiety for the post on the day on which intimation of anything that might have occurred at home at the period he had noted would reach him in due course. . . . And Miss W.'s letter 'sealed with black wax' arrived as he had feared. (Garnett, p. 211.)

He did not mention these premonitions in his letters.

at the opposite side of the field, which might sometimes be at a distance of a quarter of a mile, generally not so much. Always almost she carried a basket on her head; and usually the first hint upon which the figure arose commenced in wild plants, such as tall ferns or the purple flowers of the foxglove; but, whatever might be the colours or the forms, uniformly the same little full-formed figure arose, uniformly dressed in the little blue bed-gown and black skirt of Westmoreland, and uniformly with the air of advancing motion. Through part of June, July, and part of August, in fact throughout the summer, this frenzy of grief continued. It was reasonably to be expected that nature would avenge such senseless self-surrender to passion; for, in fact, so far from making an effort to resist it, I clung to it as a luxury (which, in the midst of suffering, it really was in part). All at once, on a day at the latter end of August, in one instant of time, I was seized with some nervous sensation that, for a moment, caused sickness. A glass of brandy removed the sickness; but I felt, to my horror, a sting as it were, of some stationary torment left behind — a torment absolutely indescribable, but under which I felt assured that life could not be borne. It is useless and impossible to describe what followed: with no apparent illness discoverable to any medical eye — looking, indeed, better than usual for three months and upwards, I was under the possession some internal nervous malady, that made each respiration which I drew an act of separate anguish. I travelled southwards immediately to Liverpool, to Birmingham, to Bristol, to Bath, for medical advice; and finally rested — in a gloomy state of despair, rather because I saw no use in further change than that I looked for any change in this place more than others — at Clifton, near Bristol. Here it was, at length, in the course of November, that, in one hour, my malady began to leave me: it was not quite so abrupt, however, in its departure, as in its first development: a peculiar sensation arose from the knee downwards, about midnight: it went forwards through a space of about five hours, and then stopped, leaving me perfectly free from every trace of the awful malady which had possessed me, but so much debilitated as with difficulty to stand or walk. Going down soon after this to Ilfracombe, in Devonshire, where there were hot sea baths, I found it easy enough to restore my shattered strength. But the remarkable fact in this catastrophe of my illness is that all grief for little Kate Wordsworth, — nay, all remembrance of her, had, with my malady, vanished from my mind.<sup>70</sup> The traces of her innocent features were utterly

<sup>70</sup> He gives a different conclusion in an undated letter to Miss Mitford circa 1843-5. (Page, I, 341.) The 'attack of nervous horror . . . lasted for five months, and went off in one night. . . I was at the time, perfectly well,

washed away from my heart: she might have been dead for a thousand years, so entirely abolished was the last lingering image of her face or figure. The little memorials of her which her mother had given to me, as, in particular, a pair of her red morocco shoes, won not a sigh from me as I looked at them: even her little grassy grave, white with snow when I returned to Grasmere in January, 1813, was looked at almost with indifference; except, indeed, as now become a memorial to me of that dire internal physical convulsion thence arising by which I had been shaken and wrenched: and, in short, a case more entirely realising the old Pagan superstition of a nympholepsy in the first place, and, secondly, of a Lethe or river of oblivion, and the possibility, by one draught of this potent stream, of applying an everlasting ablution to all the soils and stains of human anguish, I do not suppose the psychological history of man affords.' <sup>71</sup>

Just as De Quincey was recovering from the shock of Kate's death, came the news of the death of little Thomas Wordsworth. Again the letter announcing the sad event shows the recognized position of De Quincey in the family circle of the Wordsworths. The letter was from Wordsworth himself.

Tuesday evening, [Dec. 1, 1812]

My very dear Friend,

We have had measles in the house, and I write under great affliction. Thomas was seized a few days ago, i.e., last Thursday. He was held most favourably till eleven this morning, when a change suddenly took place; and, with sorrow of heart I write, he died, sweet innocent, about six this afternoon. His sufferings were short, and I think not severe. Pray come to us as soon as you can. My sister is not at home. Mrs. Wordsworth bears her loss with striking fortitude, and Miss Hutchinson is as well as can be expected. My sister will be here to-morrow.

Most tenderly and truly, with heavy sorrow for you, my dear friend, I remain,

Yours,

W. Wordsworth.<sup>72</sup>

Thus within the space of six months two of the strongest bonds binding him to the Wordsworths were snapped. Yet

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was at my cottage in Grasmere, and had just accompanied an old friend of Southey's (viz. Mr. Grosvenor Bedford) round the lake district.'

<sup>71</sup> *Works*, II, 443 ff.

<sup>72</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, II, 12.



not all. De Quincey was fond of the remaining Wordsworth children. In the following February (1813) Dorothy wrote to Mrs. Clarkson that Johnny, in order to prepare to leave the village school and to go to Mr. Dawes's, was going 'to Mr. De Quincey for a *nominal hour* every day to learn Latin upon a plan of Mr. De Quincey's own "by which a boy of the most moderate abilities may be made a good Latin scholar in six weeks"!!! This said nominal hour is generally included in the space of twenty minutes; either the scholar learns with such uncommon rapidity that more time is unnecessary, or the Master tires. Which of these conjectures is the more probable I leave you to guess.'<sup>73</sup> De Quincey was still eager to help the Wordsworths, however one answers Dorothy's dilemma; yet, on the other hand, one easily detects the tone of amused scepticism with which Dorothy speaks of him.

## X

MEANTIME De Quincey's financial position was growing less easy.<sup>74</sup> There are numerous small entries in his correspondence during these years which indicate the swarming difficulties; but his whole situation is best revealed in a letter which he wrote to his mother in 1818 reviewing the facts retrospectively:

'I had received a patrimony of £2600: being denied by my guardians the sum necessary for my support, I was obliged to contract debts [at Oxford]; and paying high interest (17½ per cent.) for money borrowed, I was obliged on coming of age [namely, in 1806] to deduct nearly £600 from my principal to acquit myself of engagements of honour. Then I had about £2000: from this I deducted in the year 1807 £300 as a gift to Mr. Coleridge. I do not mention this by way of self-applause: it was better to spend money in that way than in self-indulgence, as most young men do: but in strict morality, I admit that it was wrong: it was an act not for my fortune nor for my

<sup>73</sup> E. de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 282.

<sup>74</sup> One of his sisters refers jokingly to the desirability of his recouping his shattered fortunes by means of the lottery in 1809 (*Memls.*, II, 13). In 1810 his mother makes a tentative offer of an allowance. In January 1811 Thomas writes Henry who has asked for a loan, 'My present income is so limited that every shilling is of importance to me.' (*Memls.*, II, 157.) On 16 July 1812 his uncle in India hears that Thomas has fallen on evil days and sends him £105 (BS. MSS.; and Page, I, 181).

situation. . . In this way my fortune was reduced to £1700: about £700 to £800 was spent in books: this was almost necessary to the objects I had in view, and so far a duty if I lived in the country: but, as I might have lived in London, and have had the advantage of access to great libraries, it was not necessary, and so far it was wrong. . . . My fortune was thus reduced much below what could upon any terms support me. It was important, therefore, that I should turn to some mode of raising money. Like all persons who believe themselves in possession of *original* knowledge not derived from books, I was indisposed to sell my knowledge for money, and to commence trading author. I therefore fixed on the law as the only profession which, on many accounts, was now open to me, [namely, in 1812] and I took the necessary steps preliminary to the practice of that profession. My purpose was not to engage in any petty chase after the honours of the profession, to which by that time I was wholly indifferent' — he had been in earliest youth ambitious for high stations and honour in the state — 'but simply to get money, of which I purposed to get the greatest possible quantity in the least possible time. The necessity of stopping in the midst of pursuits really great [his studies and meditations] for such a petty purpose as the raising of a fortune was melancholy enough, and I need not say that I designed to get it over in as short a time as possible, and should have thought it to the last point wretched and insane for me, with my views, to make my profession (as most do) the serious business of life. . . . I did, however, pursue the study of the law as zealously as my means would allow me. . . . Soon after my return I came to the end of my fortune: for you do not seem to be aware that the last penny of it was gone in 1815. . . . Hence arose a difficulty in the way of my further pursuit of the law.' <sup>75</sup>

# XI

DURING these years he fell in love with Margaret Simpson and finally married her. We first hear of the Simpsons in a fragmentary draft of a casual note written on 9 March 1813 to John Simpson of The Nab, that delightful cottage under Nab Scar looking across Rydal Water, later associated with Hartley Coleridge.<sup>76</sup> There lived Simpson and his wife with a number of children, among them Margaret.

In a letter of 6 December 1827, De Quincey describes his then father-in-law:

<sup>75</sup> *Mems.*, II, 111 ff. December 1818.

<sup>76</sup> BS. MSS.

'Mr. John Simpson, my wife's father, is of an old Westmorland family, immemorially connected with the soil of that county, being of the class known locally by the denomination of 'Statesmen (i.e. Estatesmen) in contradistinction to the labouring part of the rural population. This class are honourably distinguished from those who are obliged to personal labour, and indeed from the *corresponding* classes (in a money sense) of other parts of the kingdom, by good sense — thoughtfulness — gravity of character — and general respectability. They have landed estates all the way up from £40 to £50 a year to 4 or 5 hundred; and in some cases even more. But, apart from the consideration which these estates give them, they make no pretensions to the accomplishment or rank of gentlemen. This explanation I make as some sort of answer to the question which you put on the punctuality and regular habits of Mr. J. Simpson: he has all the good qualities of his order in an eminent degree: he is now upwards of 60; [in 1812, therefore, he was about 44] has spent his life hitherto in the industrious cultivation of his estate (viz. this estate in part acquired by marriage, and a patrimonial one in Martindale, of which I know nothing); has no habits of expense whatever; and undoubtedly never contracted one shilling of debt except in connection with the improvement of his estate and latterly some of no great importance (though distressing to him at the moment) arising out of the irregularities of a son now dead. A more honourable man, or of stricter veracity and integrity, I have never known.' <sup>77</sup>

Of Mrs. Simpson, born Mary Park, we know almost nothing. In the Rydal records is a letter which glances at her indirectly. Her husband 'is a sober, regular man,' but 'rather too much influenced by his Wife to litigation.' <sup>78</sup> That is all.

Of the daughter Margaret we know hardly more. She was

<sup>77</sup> Armitt, *Rydal*, p. 692. His grand-daughter, Mrs. Bairdsmith wrote of his last years, when well over seventy he had lost his property and was living, a rather pathetic figure, in the De Quincey household at Lasswade: — 'He was a man of reserved, massive, up-right character, who in his long days and sometimes nights of solitary work, had made his own a good deal of the best literature of the country, as some of his grandchildren found long after, while trying to lighten the sleepless nights of his old age, when a chance word would loose his reserve, and this silent man would find it most easy to express himself by words from the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, Pope's "Homer," and sometimes a whole Spectator, humorous or grave, as the exciting subject might have been, and all in the homely, kindly Westmorland dialect, which in no way spoiled the recitation to our ears.' (Page, I, 194.) He was evidently a man of good intellect, if untrained; independent in his thinking — he was a 'radical' in politics — and resentful of the claims of the lord of the manor, a feeling which really caused his financial downfall.

<sup>78</sup> Armitt, *Rydal*, p. 691.

an attractive girl, but of only such schooling as the locality afforded. In 1813 when we hear of De Quincey's first connexion with the Simpson family, she was seventeen; she was baptized at St. Oswald's, Grasmere on 21 March 1796. Her ingenuousness in those early years is best seen in an incident which obviously applies to her, told in De Quincey's novel, *The Spanish Military Nun*, the only anecdote of her girlhood preserved. The author is speaking of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. 'I had given a copy of this little novel to a beautiful girl of seventeen, the daughter of a 'statesman in Westmorland,' without telling her that it was fiction. When next he saw 'the young mountaineer' he 'was perplexed by the unfaltering gravity with which my fair young friend spoke of Dr. Primrose, of Sophia and her sister, of Squire Thornhill, etc., as real and probably living personages, who could sue and be sued. It appeared that this artless young rustic, who had never heard of novels and romances as a bare possibility amongst all the shameless devices of London swindlers, had read with religious fidelity every word of this tale . . . without suspecting for a moment that, by so much as a breathing of exaggeration or of embellishment, the pure gospel truth of the narrative could have been sullied. She listened in a kind of breathless stupor to my frank explanation that not part only, but the whole, of this natural tale was a pure invention. Scorn and indignation flashed from her eyes. She regarded herself as one who had been hoaxed and swindled; begged me to take back the book; and never again, to the end of her life, could endure to look into the book, or to be reminded of that criminal imposture which Dr. Oliver Goldsmith had practised upon her youthful credulity.' <sup>79</sup>

How intimacy sprang up between De Quincey and the family at the Nab is not recorded. It was apparently unusual for social intercourse to develop between 'gentlemen' and 'natives.' Japp quotes a note of John Wilson in the autumn of 1814, in which Wilson tells of having walked to De Quincey's cottage which he reached at half-past one of a Sunday morning. Wilson wrote, 'De Quincey was at the *Nab*, and when he returned about three o'clock, found me asleep in his

bed.' <sup>80</sup> On Friday, 23 December 1814, De Quincey invited Wilson to come to dinner on Christmas eve 'to meet a party, viz: — young Mr. Jackson, Miss Huddleston, the family from the Nab, and others.' The note was sent by the hands of young John Simpson. <sup>81</sup> We next find rumours that De Quincey was to marry Margaret Simpson — evidence that he was a frequent visitor at the Nab; and these rumours got as far afield as his mother at Wrington, in Somersetshire. On 9 September 1815 <sup>82</sup> Mrs. Quincey wrote to him as follows: — 'I have wavered often while writing this note, and at last resolve to say a word of the report which we now suppose had no truth in it. It seemed to come from high authority that you were about to marry, and nothing short of an oracular Voice could have made us listen to the tale, considering your want of means to meet the demands of a family. I am, however, so much entitled, and do really feel so affectionate an interest in your happiness, that I cannot help begging you to let me know your designs, and also to consider well before you trust the mere impulse of feeling, if, as I have just now heard, the sober judgment of your Friends cannot approve the step. I can abate much of what the world demands in marriage, but I know that there are congruities which are indispensable to *you*, which you may overlook in the delusion of fancy, and be forced to see every moment of your life after to be wanting to your comfort, when you are come to yourself.' We have no reply to this letter of his mother's; but in the long financial statement of 1818 from which I have already quoted, De Quincey speaks of this period and of his situation. 'I had long been attached to a young woman, and had visited her: for some time this was undiscovered; but when it was discovered, I felt myself as much bound in honour as I was inclined by affection to marry her; a connection between a gentleman and the daughter of a 'Statesman would have exposed her to a scandal which she could never have got over. I did marry her, but I did not communicate my marriage to you, believing that, from her station in life and want of fortune, it would give you pain.'

<sup>80</sup> Page, I, 181.

<sup>81</sup> *Memls.*, II, 39.

<sup>82</sup> Not 1816, as Japp gives the date, *Memls.*, II, 109: compare II, 59.

Meanwhile, during the goings-on of De Quincey with Margaret Simpson, there was bound to be unpleasant talk which must have hurt his sensitive nature, even though it did not succeed in spurring him on to declare his intentions of marriage. He seems to have sought relief not only in opium but in heavy drinking and in solitude. As early as November 1815, when Wilson had come for a fortnight to Elleray, Sara Hutchinson had written to Thomas Monkhouse of De Quincey's carousing with his friend. 'Wilson was tolerably steady, though De Quincey was often tipsy. We believe that he will marry Peggy S. after all. He doses himself with opium and drinks like a ff[ish], and tries in all other ways to be as great a g[un] as Mr. Wilson.' She was writing with evident condemnation for the backslidings of a family friend, and no doubt with reason; for De Quincey was certainly in a desperate mood in those dark days, as the mere fact of his deep drinking would show, since he was usually temperate in alcohol. Months later, in October 1816, when his affair with Margaret had indeed become serious, Crabb Robinson called upon him and found him 'in a sore state' and resentful of 'imagined comments' upon his conduct by the Wordsworths. There was inevitable estrangement on both sides. De Quincey felt that Wordsworth was condemning him, and he never recovered from the suspicion. He was probably right, for Wordsworth could not have done otherwise. But the Wordsworth ladies seem to have been the more outspoken in their censoriousness.<sup>88</sup> Whatever the details, these years of 1815 and 1816, in spite of De Quincey's love for Margaret, must have been painful, indeed, and not to be recalled with satisfaction or with pride.

The further facts of the case are as follows: — The register of the Grasmere parish church contains this record of baptism: — 'Nov. 15, 1816. William Penson, illegitimate son of Margaret Simpson, Nab.' It also contains this record of marriage: — 'Thomas De Quincey, Esqre. of this parish and Margaret Simpson of this parish were married in this church

<sup>88</sup> E. de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 303.

It is perhaps worth noting that Wilson, although he was evidently in touch with De Quincey's affair, seems never to have expressed any condemnation by word or act.

by licence with consent of parents and friends this fifteenth Day of February in the year One thousand and eighteen hundred and seventeen. By me, William Jackson, Curate. . . . In the presence of John Simpson, Geo. Mackereth.<sup>84</sup>

## XII

DE QUINCEY had returned to Grasmere to settle into Dove Cottage in 1809. But the shadow of the conviction that De Quincey had been the real cause for the vexatious delay of the Cintra pamphlet in the spring of 1809, and the recognition in sharpened form of some of De Quincey's inherent shortcomings must have been often present in the Wordsworth minds, forming an actual, if intangible barrier to complete friendship. On the other hand, De Quincey had begun to feel that much as he still adored Wordsworth the poet, Wordsworth the man was not beyond criticism. Wordsworth was certainly proud and often positive in his expression of opinion; given to dogmatism, which definitely closed all possible discussion and left a feeling of unfairness behind. Sometimes in his dislike of 'fending and proving,' he refused to listen to explanations in which, no doubt, he felt that the over-anxious De Quincey dwelt unduly on matters of no importance. And in literary questions, that certainty of judgment which Wordsworth attained from sheer penetration of poetic insight, often ran painfully counter to the romantic tastes of his more bookish and not always more soundly appreciative friend. In the essay on the 'Estrangement from Wordsworth,' De Quincey cites one example which to us a hundred years later reflects not upon the taste of Wordsworth so much as upon that of De Quincey himself. De Quincey put into Wordsworth's hands a 'most splendid tale' of Harriet Lee,

<sup>84</sup> These dates were first printed by Miss Armitt in her *Rydal* (1916), p. 685. In the Manchester Library is a note by Mr. W. E. A. Axon reading as follows: — 'In the Diocesan (late Archdeaconry of Richmond) Registry, Lancaster, in Mr. Satterthwaite's office, Cable Street, is the marriage licence bond of Thomas De Quincey. It is dated February 11, 1817: the bondsmen are described as Thomas De Quincey of Grasmere, esquire, and John Simpson, of Grasmere, husbandman, the couple to be married as Thomas De Quincey, 30 years, and Margaret Simpson of Grasmere, spinster, 21, and they were to be married in Grasmere.' The bond is signed by Thomas De Quincey, John Simpson. The signature only has the capital D in *De Quincey*. Mr. Axon saw the bond on 5 February 1912.

with ' the truly Shakespearean portrait of feminine innocence and nobility in Josephine; ' and Wordsworth's comments were to the effect that it left an uncomfortable impression of a woman's being too clever.<sup>85</sup> But the point is not that Wordsworth was, or was not, the better critic; but that his appreciation of literature was often at odds with that of De Quincey who was himself, albeit his expressions of judgment were frequently accompanied by elaborate analyses, as positive and hardly less arbitrary.<sup>86</sup> And Wordsworth furthermore seemed to De Quincey sometimes peevish — the result, perhaps, of impatience with Thomas's meticulous discussion of fine points; and lacking in understanding, in sympathy, or what you will, in his attitude toward certain persons whom De Quincey loved or admired — Wilson, for example, or Lloyd. Wordsworth and De Quincey did not see eye to eye on many subjects; it was the fault of neither; it was the consequence of diverse natures.

But there were more concrete differences which developed. Thus, for example, De Quincey's housekeeper, Mary Dawson, in her authority as mistress of Dove Cottage during his absences prevented the Wordsworths from quartering their guests now and then in his house on the plea that he had given this or that contrary direction, in spite of the fact that he always left a standing invitation to them to use the cottage at their pleasure. He felt that his servant's recalcitrancy brought resentment against himself, in spite of explanations. It is impossible to prove or disprove such filmy possibilities. But where there were so much greater reasons for growing coolness, even imaginary friction perhaps played its part.

Then followed the deaths of the children. All temperamental differences were forgotten in tenderness born of the common sorrow. Next came the reaction. De Quincey was prostrated and became increasingly and distressingly ill. His

<sup>85</sup> *Works*, III, 205.

<sup>86</sup> Miss Emily de Quincey, many years later, namely on 24 July 1907, wrote to Mr. H. S. Salt, ' The novels of his youth were of the Mrs. Radcliffe order full of mysteries, murders, high-waymen, mysterious people and dark corners. . . He never got beyond the Mrs. Radcliffe stage and he was but a poor judge of a novel. He could make nothing of the modern novel with its pictures of real life. The heroes and heroines of his youth were all upon stilts.' (Salt MSS.)



opium habit increased to a degree which must have been apparent to the Wordsworth family. The illness, the opium, the coolness threw De Quincey into more of the solitude so natural to him. Then as a result of all these factors, especially the loss of little Kate and Tom, which removed from his life objects of passionate devotion, he felt an intense longing for human companionship and for love. Here, in some way not known to us, he became attracted to Margaret Simpson. By 1815 he 'had long been attached to a young woman; ' the attachment would seem to have begun in the year following the death of Catherine. By the autumn of 1814 he was intimate with the Simpson family. Yet his financial situation was at that time almost desperate. Marriage was hardly to be thought of. Moreover, she was the daughter of a 'statesman and he was a gentleman. Considerations of friends and family must have made ideas of marriage seem even more impossible. Yet he loved her; his devotion to her to the very end of her life places this beyond doubt. His judgment was not strong enough to keep him from entering into relations with her. He may have been thoughtless; he certainly brought upon himself consequences of far reaching effect by his act; but his love in 1816 gave him the impetus to pull himself out of the sea of opium which had almost swallowed him until he could for the time control his will and his habits.

Meantime came the inevitable rumours of his interest in Margaret Simpson; they reached his mother, as we have seen. In so small a community the scandal of extra-legal connexion was certain to be abroad — and to reach the ears of the Wordsworths. Wordsworth must have felt keenly the situation involving a gentleman so closely intimate with his own family and a dalesman's daughter. There can be no doubt that this scandal brought the final break in the relations between De Quincey and the Wordsworth household. We shall see that there were later relations of a more or less friendly, if formal sort; we shall see that Dorothy continued in her beautiful human way to be friendly to De Quincey and his wife. But the old intimacy was at an end. There is a note which De Quincey wrote to Wordsworth sometime after 1816 — a note introducing a casual acquaintance — in which he

apologizes for the liberty which he was taking, but still claiming the privilege 'in virtue of having been once honoured with a place in your good opinion.'<sup>87</sup> There is an almost tragic touch in that phrase.

Why did he not marry Margaret Simpson earlier and save her the humiliation of becoming the mother of an illegitimate son? There is no answer. He was in love with her; he certainly made no effort to hide his paternity — for he had the boy named William Penson; William for his eldest brother, Penson for his mother's family. He obviously intended to marry her. He may well have been frightened at the new obligations which fell upon him as the result of his impulse or passion. But there was no escape, had he sought to find one; and he finally did marry Margaret in February 1817.

<sup>87</sup> GW. MSS.

CHAPTER XII  
THE WESTMORLAND GAZETTE

1818—1819

I

THIS year of 1817 'was a year of brilliant water. . . . Again my feelings of pleasure expanded themselves to all around me: and, if any man from Oxford or Cambridge, or from neither, had been announced to me in my unpretending cottage, I should have welcomed him with as sumptuous a reception as so poor a man could offer.'

Happy De Quincey was, in surroundings which he describes as ideal:

'Let there be a cottage, standing in a valley, eighteen miles from any town — no spacious valley, but about two miles long, by three-quarters of a mile in average width; the benefit of which provision is that all the families resident within its circuit will compose, as it were, one larger household personally familiar to your eye, and more or less interesting to your affections. Let the mountains be real mountains, between three and four thousand feet high; and the cottage, a real cottage; not, as a witty author has it, "a cottage with a double coach-house: " let it be, in fact — for I must abide by the actual scene — a white cottage, embowered with flowering shrubs, so chosen as to unfold a succession of flowers upon the walls, and clustering round the windows, through all the months of spring, summer, and autumn — beginning, in fact, with May roses, and ending with jasmine. Let it, however, *not* be spring, nor summer, nor autumn — but winter, in his sternest shape. This is a most important point in the science of happiness.'

And he goes on to give the famous instructions to a painter:

'Paint me, then, a room seventeen feet by twelve, and not more than seven and a half feet high. This, reader, is somewhat ambitiously styled, in my family, the drawing-room: but, being contrived "a double debt to pay," it is also, and more justly, termed the library; for it happens that books are the only article of property in which I am richer than my neighbours. Of these, I have about five thousand, collected gradually since my eighteenth year. Therefore, painter, put as many as you can into this room. Make it populous with books: and,

furthermore, paint me a good fire; and furniture, plain and modest, befitting the unpretending cottage of a scholar. And, near the fire, paint me a tea-table; and, as it is clear that no creature can come to see one on such a stormy night, place only two cups and saucers on the tea-tray: and, if you know how to paint a thing symbolically, or otherwise, paint me an eternal tea-pot — eternal *à parte ante*, and *à parte post*; for I usually drink tea from eight o'clock at night to four o'clock in the morning. And, as it is very unpleasant to make tea, or to pour it out for oneself, paint me a lovely young woman, sitting at the table. Paint her arms like Aurora's, and her smiles like Hebe's: — But no, dear M[argaret], not even in jest let me insinuate that thy power to illuminate my cottage rests upon a tenure so perishable as mere personal beauty; or that the witchcraft of angelic smiles lies within the empire of any earthly pencil. Pass, then, my good painter, to something more within its power: and the next article brought forward should naturally be myself — a picture of the Opium-eater with his "little golden receptacle of the pernicious drug," lying beside him on the table. As to the opium, I have no objection to see a picture of *that*, though I would rather see the original: but you may paint it, if you choose; but I apprise you, that no "little" receptacle would, even in 1816, answer *my* purpose, who was at a distance from the "stately Pantheon," and all druggists (mortal or otherwise).<sup>1</sup> No: you may as well paint the receptacle, which was not of gold, but of glass, and as much like a wine decanter as possible. Into this you may put a quart of ruby-coloured laudanum: that, and a book of German metaphysics placed by its side, will sufficiently attest my being in the neighbourhood; but as to myself, — there I demur.'<sup>2</sup>

Such is the romantic view as De Quincey sketched it for the world. But such was not the picture as his neighbours saw it. The attitude of the Wordsworth household finds utterance in a letter of Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson of 2 March 1817. It is not sympathetic; it shows, indeed the natural reaction of a family which had been once friendly and had cooled; but whatever may have been the feelings of the moment, Dorothy later acted toward De Quincey and his wife with all her wonted kindliness. At this date, however, the wedding was not long past, and the irregular relations which it legalized were fresh in mind.

<sup>1</sup> Obviously 1817, not 1816 as he writes; for he was not married until February 1817.

<sup>2</sup> Garnett, pp. 110 ff.

'Mr. De Quincey is married; and I fear I may add he is ruined. By degrees he withdrew himself from all society except that of the Symptons of the Nab (that pretty farm house between Rydal and Grasmere). At the up-rouzing of the Bats and the Owls he regularly went thither, and the consequence was that Peggy Sympton, the eldest daughter of the house presented him with a son ten weeks ago, and they . . . are now spending their honey-moon in our cottage at Grasmere. This in truth is a melancholy story! He uttered in raptures of the beauty, the good sense, the simplicity "the angelic sweetness" of Miss Sympton, who to all other judgments appeared to be a stupid heavy girl, and was reckoned a Dunce at Grasmere School, and I predict that all these witcheries are ere this removed, and the fireside already dull. They have never been seen out of doors, except after the day was gone. As for him I am very sorry for him — he is utterly changed in appearance and takes largely of opium.'<sup>3</sup>

## II

Up to the middle of 1817, he tells us, he was happy. 'But now farewell, a long farewell, to happiness, winter or summer! farewell to smiles and laughter! farewell to peace of mind, to tranquil dreams, and to the blessed consolations of sleep! For more than three years and a half I am summoned away from these. Here opens upon me an Iliad of woes: for I now enter upon THE PAINS OF OPIUM.'

Two years later — 'My studies have now been long interrupted. I cannot read to myself with any pleasure, hardly with a moment's endurance. Yet I read aloud sometimes for the pleasure of others; because, reading is an accomplishment of mine; and in the slang use of the word *accomplishment* as a superficial and ornamental attainment, almost the only one I possess.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 2 March 1817. E. de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 304.

<sup>4</sup> Woodhouse comments upon De Quincey's reading aloud in his Note-book: — 'It seems to me, from the manner in which the Opium-Eater recited a few lines occasionally which he had occasion to quote, that the reading upon which in his Confessions he piques himself would scarcely appear good to most people. He reads with too inward a voice; he dwells much upon the long vowels (this he does in his conversation, which makes it resemble more a speech delivered in a debating society than the varitonus discourse usually held among friends); he ekes out particular syllables, has generally much appearance of intensity, and, in short, removes his tone and manner rather too much from the mode of common language. Hence I could not always catch the words in his quotations, and though one acquainted with the quotation

It is best to let him describe his sufferings. 'Of late, if I have felt moved by anything in books, it has been by the grand lamentations of Samson Agonistes, or the great harmonies of the Satanic speeches in Paradise Regained, when read aloud by myself. A young lady sometimes comes and drinks tea with us; at her request and M[argaret]'s I now and then read Wordsworth's poems to them.'

'For nearly two years I believe that I read no book but one: and I owe it to the author, in discharge of a great debt of gratitude, to mention what that was. The sublimer and more passionate poets I still read, as I have said, by snatches, and occasionally. But my proper vocation, as I well knew, was the exercise of the analytic understanding. Now, for the most part, analytic studies are continuous, and not to be pursued by fits and starts, or fragmentary efforts. Mathematics, for instance, intellectual philosophy, etc. were all become insupportable to me; I shrunk from them with a sense of powerless and infantine feebleness that gave me an anguish the greater from remembering the time when I grappled with them to my own hourly delight; and for this further reason, because I had devoted the labour of my whole life, and had dedicated my intellect, blossoms and fruits, to the slow and elaborate toil of constructing one single work, to which I had presumed to give the title of an unfinished work of Spinoza's; viz. *De emendatione humani intellectus*. This was now lying locked up, as by frost, like any Spanish bridge or aqueduct, begun upon too great a scale for the resources of the architect; and, instead of surviving me as a monument of wishes at least, and aspirations, and a life of labour dedicated to the exaltation of human nature in that way in which God had best fitted me to promote so great an object, it was likely to stand as a memorial to my children of hopes defeated, of baffled efforts, of materials uselessly accumulated, of foundations laid that were never to support a superstructure, — of the grief and the ruin of the architect. In this state of imbecility, I had, for amusement, turned my attention to political economy; my understanding, which formerly had been as active and restless as a hyena, could not, I suppose (so long as I lived at all) sink into utter lethargy; and political economy offers this advantage to a person in my state, that though it is eminently an organic science (no part, that is to say, but what acts

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beforehand would relish it the more from having an opportunity afforded of dwelling upon it, and from hearing the most made of those particular parts for the sake of which it is brought forward, yet general hearers would be left far behind, and in a state of wonder at the quoter.' (Garnett, p. 198.) See also, *Posthumous Works*, I, 317 ff.

on the whole, as the whole again reacts on each part), yet the several parts may be detached and contemplated singly. Great as was the prostration of my powers at this time, yet I could not forget my knowledge; and my understanding had been for too many years intimate with severe thinkers, with logic, and the great masters of knowledge, not to be aware of the utter feebleness of the main herd of modern economists. I had been led in 1811 [and some years before that at Everton in 1805] to look into loads of books and pamphlets on many branches of economy; and, at my desire, M[argaret] sometimes read to me chapters from more recent works, or parts of parliamentary debates. I saw that these were generally the very dregs and rinsings of the human intellect; and that any man of sound head, and practised in wielding logic with a scholastic adroitness, might take up the whole academy of modern economists, and throttle them between heaven and earth with his finger and thumb, or bray their fungus heads to powder with a lady's fan. At length in 1819,<sup>5</sup> a friend in Edinburgh sent me down Mr. Ricardo's book: and recurring to my own prophetic anticipation of the advent of some legislator for this science, I said, before I had finished the first chapter, "Thou art the man!" Wonder and curiosity were emotions that had long been dead in me. Yet I wondered once more: I wondered at myself that I could once again be stimulated to the effort of reading; and much more I wondered at the book. . . .

'Thus did one single work of a profound understanding avail to give me a pleasure and an activity which I had not known for years:- it roused me even to write, or, at least, to dictate what M[argaret] wrote for me. It seemed to me that some important truths had escaped even "the inevitable eye" of Mr. Ricardo: and, as these were, for the most part, of such a nature that I could express or illustrate them more briefly and elegantly by algebraic symbols than in the usual clumsy and loitering diction of economists, the whole would not have filled a pocketbook; and being so brief, with M[argaret] for my amanuensis, even at this time, incapable as I was of all general exertion, I drew up my *Prologomena to all future Systems of Political Economy*. I hope it will not be redolent of opium; though, indeed, to most people, the subject itself is a sufficient opiate.

'This exertion, however, was but a temporary flash, as the sequel showed. . . . Arrangements were made at a provincial press, about eighteen miles distant [at Kendal] for printing it.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The revised edition gives this date as 1818.

<sup>6</sup> I have not been able to substantiate this statement — a fact in no way disproving it.

An additional compositor was retained, for some days, on this account. The work was even twice advertised; and I was, in a manner, pledged to the fulfilment of my intention. But I had a preface to write; and a dedication, which I wished to make a splendid one to Mr. Ricardo. I found myself quite unable to accomplish all this. The arrangements were countermanded: the compositor dismissed: and my "Prologomena" rested peacefully by the side of its elder and more dignified brother.<sup>7</sup>

'I have thus described and illustrated my intellectual torpor, in terms that apply, more or less, to every part of the four years during which I was under the Circean spells of opium. But for misery and suffering, I might, indeed, be said to have existed in a dormant state. I seldom could prevail on myself to write a letter; an answer of a few words, to any that I received, was the utmost that I could accomplish; and often *that* not until the letter had lain weeks, or even months, on my writing table. Without the aid of M[argaret] all record of bills paid, or *to be* paid, must have perished: and my whole domestic economy, whatever became of Political Economy, must have gone into irretrievable confusion. — I shall not afterwards allude to this part of the case: it is one, however, which the opium-eater will find, in the end, as oppressive and tormenting as any other, from the sense of incapacity and feebleness, from the direct embarrassments incident to the neglect or procrastination of each day's appropriate duties, and from the remorse which must often exasperate the stings of these evils to a reflective and conscientious mind. The opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities, or aspirations: he wishes and longs, as earnestly as ever, to realize what he believes possible, and feels to be exacted by duty; but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of execution only, but even of power to attempt.'<sup>8</sup>

### III

IN this dark period after the brief emergence into light of 1816–7, he records an important change in his physical condition. He began to notice

'the re-awakening of a state of eye generally incident to childhood, or exalted states of irritability. . . . In the middle of 1817, I think it was, that this faculty became positively distressing to me: at night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions passed along in mournful pomp; friezes of never-ending stories, drawn from times before Oedipus or Priam — before Tyre — before Memphis. And, at the same time, a cor-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Garnett, pp. 120 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.



responding change took place in my dreams; a theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour. . . .

'As the creative state of the eye increased, a sympathy seemed to arise between the waking and the dreaming states of the brain in one point — that whatsoever I happened to call up and to trace by a voluntary act upon the darkness was very apt to transfer itself to my dreams; so that I feared to exercise this faculty. . . . This, and all other changes in my dreams, were accompanied by deep-seated anxiety and gloomy melancholy, such as are wholly incommunicable by words. I seemed every night to descend, not metaphorically, but literally to descend, into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever reascend. Nor did I, by waking, feel that I *had* reascended. . . . The sense of space, and in the end, the sense of time, were both powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, etc. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. . . . The minutest incidents of childhood, or forgotten scenes of later years, were often revived: I could not be said to recollect them; for if I had been told of them when waking, I should not have been able to acknowledge them as parts of my past experience. But placed as they were before me, in dreams like intuitions, and clothed in all their evanescent circumstances and accompanying feelings, I *recognised* them instantaneously.' \*

Then it was that there occurred those terrifying dreams which are described at the end of the *Confessions* — the overpowering mass of architecture, like that of the famous 'Dreams' of Piranesi with their 'aerial flight of stairs . . . lost in the upper gloom,' the pomp of cities and palaces . . . never yet beheld by the waking eye, unless in clouds; lakes and silvery expanses of waters through tremendous change coming to be 'paved with innumerable faces . . . that surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations;' Asiatic scenery with all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles in which he was idol, priest; in which he was worshipped, sacrificed; buried in stone coffins with mummies and sphinxes; haunted by crocodiles until the very horror of the dreams woke him to find 'gentle voices speaking' — those of his children, come to show him their new shoes or frocks, or to let him see them dressed for going out. 'No experience was so awful to me,'

he wrote, 'and at the same time so pathetic, as this abrupt translation from the darkness of the infinite to the gaudy summer air of highest noon, and from the unutterable abortions of miscreated gigantic vermin to the sight of infancy and innocent *human* natures.'

'At length I grew afraid to sleep; and I shrunk from it as from the most savage tortures. Often I have fought with my own drowsiness, and kept it aloof by sitting up the whole night and following day. Sometimes I lay down only in the daytime, and sought to charm away the phantoms by requesting my family to sit round me and to talk, hoping thus to draw an influence from what externally affected me into my internal world of shadows; but, far from that, I infected and stained, as it were, the whole of my waking experience with the feelings derived from sleep. I seemed indeed to live, and to converse even, when awake, with my visionary companions much more than with the realities of life. "Oh, what do you see, dear? what is it that you see?" was the constant exclamation of M[argaret] by which I was awakened as soon as I had fallen asleep (though to me it seemed as if I had slept for years). My groans had, it seems, awakened her; and, from her account, they had commenced immediately on my falling asleep.'<sup>10</sup>

'More and more also I felt violent palpitations in some internal region, such as are commonly, but erroneously, called palpitations of the heart — being, as I suppose, referable exclusively to derangements in the stomach. These were evidently increasing rapidly in frequency and in strength. Naturally, therefore, on considering how important my life had become to others besides myself, I became alarmed; and I paused seasonably; but with a difficulty that is past all description. . . . Nothing short of mortal anguish, in a physical sense it seemed, to wean myself from opium; yet, on the other hand, death through overwhelming nervous terrors — death by brain-fever or lunacy — seemed too certainly to besiege the alternative course. Fortunately, I had still so much of firmness left as to face the choice, which, with most of instant suffering, showed in the far distance a possibility of final escape.'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Page, I, 197; quoted from 'an unpublished writing' which I have not seen.

<sup>11</sup> *Works*, III, 447. In 1816-7 occurred two strange incidents: the one gave him a nervous shock and added to his horrors; the other furnished matter for his dreams. He was three times running bitten by a dog and was seized by fears of hydrophobia: fears in his physical and mental condition really serious. (*Memoirs*, II, 117.) Again there was the unexplained appearance of a Malay at the door of his cottage which so startled De Quincey that the strange oriental became at once a figure in his dreams. (*Works*, III, 402 ff.)

## IV

SUDDENLY in the spring of 1818, and without warning, De Quincey was agitated, deeply agitated, over the political drama being enacted in Westmorland. Brougham was running for Parliament against the Lowther interests which had been in control for many years. Brougham was a radical, a dangerous citizen, trying to stir the country to reform; the safe and solid Wordsworth and De Quincey found themselves once more in communication and in co-operation fighting for the good cause of Toryism; and in its defence De Quincey became the editor of *The Westmorland Gazette*.

Wordsworth was the outstanding Tory of the neighbourhood of Grasmere, or, at least, the only prominent Tory whom De Quincey felt he had the right to address. On 25 March 1818 De Quincey wrote a hectic note, burning with indignation at what he considered a betrayal of the Lowther cause. 'On the arrival of Mr. Brougham this morning, and during his stay here, the *Church Bells were rung*. And this insult to the house of Lowther (in their own manor surely it must be thought so) was not offered without the knowledge of Mr. Jackson [the vicar]. . . That Mr. Jackson should have any adequate sense of the contest, I never expected; but he knows what is fidelity to a cause, and what is treachery.' Then in a postscript, De Quincey reported, 'that a female servant of Mr. Jackson's attended to hear Mr. Brougham's speech at the Red Lion, wearing Mr. Brougham's colour, with the permission (she says) of her Master.' So much disgusted was De Quincey that he no longer intended to use Mr. Jackson's assistance for getting two papers, two political articles which he hoped would be useful to the cause, laid before the Committee; with one of which he had taken great pains; and he asked Wordsworth for help or advice.

It turned out, as Wordsworth wrote to him, that Mr. Jackson did not have 'the command of the Bells.' But De Quincey still thought him a dangerous ally, one who had done 'injury . . . to the cause hereabouts by overbearing language and insinuations . . . according to his own character.'<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> GW. MSS., 29 March 1818.

But since Mr. Jackson was not guilty of the bell-ringing, De Quincey supposed that he must rely upon him for transmitting *one* paper to the Committee, since Jackson had volunteered. The other paper, however, he wished to send through Wordsworth; first, to have his aid in revisal; secondly, to have his influence with the Committee, thinking that the paper would be of some use among the 'deluded yeomanry' and hoping that it might be sent not merely to *The Carlisle Patriot*, but also printed as a handbill.

This is the first paper which we are certain De Quincey wrote after the Note on Sir John Moore for Wordsworth's Cintra pamphlet and the Prologomena to Political Economy. But characteristically the manuscript would not be ready until Tuesday morning; and it was too long, although he had laboured to make it shorter; a complaint which was constantly recurring when he was particularly unwell or particularly worried.<sup>13</sup>

In the same letter to Wordsworth follows a paragraph of unusual personal interest. 'I accused Mr. Jackson the other day of double-dealing; and I fear that those who overrate my influence at the Nab, may — in reference to the conduct of that family — think that I lie open to the same charge; one word, therefore, on this subject: — John Simpson is, I am sorry to say it, a rank Jacobin; not from any delusion of his judgment, but as a pure malignant towards the nobility — gentry — clergy — magistracy — and the institutions of the land. I understand that you condescended to talk with him; giving him credit no doubt for conscientious scruples in regard to the Lowthers; but in that you did him too much honor. I have talked with him for years upon politics; so that I know his temper in that point; and have found that all efforts at giving him better feelings to be weaving Penelope's web; and have accordingly abjured all such conversation with

<sup>13</sup> Mr. W. E. A. Axon in his valuable paper on the *Canon of De Quincey's Writings* (Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, vol. 32, pt. I, 1913) tells of his finding a copy of this pamphlet — *Close Commentary upon a Straggling Speech*, an octavo pamphlet of 16 pp. printed by Airey and Bellingham, Kendal, 1818. Brougham's speech at Appleby is the theme, and the pamphlet is a Tory polemic. As Mr. Axon suggests, the document was doubtless the chief evidence of De Quincey's fitness for the editorship of the *Westmorland Gazette*.

him for ever. His wife and eldest son share with him, perhaps go beyond him, in rancorous Jacobinism, and are ready at this moment to abet Mr. Brougham with all their might; though they were not noticed by him; whilst (as my wife this morning reproached her mother) they *have* been noticed by the heads of the other party as to rank and as to intellect in having had attentions from Lord Lowther and yourself.'

Here is an exhibition of sheer snobbishness which is observable only in this particular period of De Quincey's life, explicable only on the assumption that he is here deliberately ingratiating himself with the estranged Wordsworth on grounds of party loyalty to the Lowther party, and preparing to make himself the logical candidate for the editorship of *The Westmorland Gazette* upon which he already had his eye. With this aim, he dragged in his wife. The whole tone of the letter shows that De Quincey was in an abnormal state, easily accounted for by his physical and mental tortures.

Notes follow asking for advice as to facts and phrases in the pamphlet; giving studied praise to Wordsworth's own pamphlet, which had been sent over to him by the poet's son John; discussing the progress of the campaign and the iniquities of Brougham; and promising two other papers for some time in preparation. The letter of April 8 was so full and elaborate that Wordsworth proposed that it be printed in part; a letter so long that De Quincey was preparing to apologize for it. The fact is, he wrote (April 14), 'that having little opportunity of expressing my thoughts and feelings on important subjects — and on this particular subject meeting with nobody among the few whom I see to consider the contest in its just importance, I felt a pleasure in delivering myself from the burthen of feelings which press strongly upon me, and in which, as I said, I can look for little general sympathy.' Then he reverted once more to Mrs. De Quincey: — 'When I say this, however, let me do justice to my wife; and let me acknowledge that from the very first she has accompanied me in my view of the case with a generous warmth of feeling, according to her humble pretensions in point of knowledge and experience; and just now with so much more of warmth as may be expected from her lively gratitude for the honour

done to me by yourself and the Committee. Indeed, long before this particular movement of jacobinical violence, she had learned to feel justly on this subject; and, in spite of repeated attempts from her family to win her over to their way of thinking, uniformly behaved and expressed herself on all points referring to the traitorous efforts for nursing discontent and disrespect towards the government, etc. in that manner which may be always expected I suppose when the heart is not habitually malignant nor the understanding greatly abused.'

Then came tentative inquiries about the editorship. 'I learned a fact on Saturday night from Mr. Jackson which leads me to trouble you with an application — one main purpose of which, I acknowledge frankly, respects my private advantage. I have long wondered why the new Kendal Paper should not, at so important a time, be set in motion; and once before endeavoured without success to learn the cause: but on Saturday night Mr. Jackson informed me that *one* cause at least of the delay was the want of an Editor: I understood him that this post had been offered to you; and that you had refused it. Now, if this be so, and if the post be still undisposed of, do you know any reasons which should make it imprudent or unbecoming in me to apply for it? If you do not, and there should be no other person whose interests in this case you are inclined to prefer, I feel confident that you will do me the kindness to assist me in obtaining it with your recommendation. I must mention, however, which possibly may be alone sufficient to defeat my application, that in about a year I should be under the necessity of resigning the place; having an intention then or soon after to remove finally to London for the prosecution of my profession as a lawyer. That part of an editor's duties which respects the mechanical and commercial management of a Paper, I should certainly not be competent to undertake; but perhaps this department could be conducted by some clever compositor or other person about the Press; and at any rate, with advice from a judicious man of business, I could learn even this part (which in a place no larger than Kendal, cannot be very intricate); and, in respect of the Selection of articles from the London Papers and the

Political Comments on them, I trust that I should be able to satisfy the wishes of the patriotic subscribers. In one point you may still feel some doubt of my competence to do so, judging from your former knowledge of me; in punctuality, I mean, and power of steady perseverance: but in this I have altered since I had the happiness to associate with you; and, among other grounds of remorse, I have suffered too much in conscience on account of time left unimproved or misemployed, ever to offend in that way again, even upon calls of less importance than this would be. I do not suppose that the profits of Editorship as connected with a Kendal Paper (and that too under the disadvantage of opposing an established rival), can be very considerable; but a trifling emolument would at this time be very useful to me; and I should be happy to draw *that* from an employment that would be on other accounts agreeable to me, and which, from the peculiar service and duties imposed upon it as its distinguishing purpose, I should look upon as truly a service of honor. In humble testimony of my respect for this purpose, I shall at any rate (let the event of this application be what it may) think it a duty to contribute everything in my power to support the Paper.' He concluded by giving a list of articles which he proposed to write, or which he had on hand.

The correspondence thus makes it clear that De Quincey applied for the editorship; that it was through Wordsworth he sought it; and, as further evidence indicates, that it was presumably through Wordsworth's influence that he obtained it. He certainly used every means of persuasion; and among others he promised to write a paper defending Wordsworth against his literary critics, a revival of the promise he had made in 1809 and had never fulfilled! The letters which follow are full of the same eager support of the Lowther cause; suggesting that a subscription be opened for the family of a father and son killed in the Lonsdale quarries at Patterdale, towards which he offered to subscribe 'in my place and according to my means'; expressing thanks for the honour done his article; announcing two other papers almost ready for the Committee; urging that Wordsworth reprint a part of *his*

political pamphlet as a handbill — all this is in a tone of excited eagerness, which is new in his correspondence; a tone which his mother characterized as she gathered it from his letters to her during this same period of 1818–9, ‘as the terrible irritation which [he] laboured under both from disease and medicine.’

De Quincey’s application for the editorship was not at once considered favourably; instead, an editor was procured from London. But, as De Quincey says in a letter to his uncle, ‘he disgusted them [namely, the proprietors of the sheet] in every way;’<sup>14</sup> and the editorship soon fell vacant. Then the post was offered to De Quincey. The salary was £160 a year, and the condition involved was that he should reside in Kendal. ‘This I would have done,’ he wrote, ‘but my wife’s illness, and an utter impossibility of raising the money for moving in the time prescribed’ — namely between the 9th and the 16th of July — ‘obliged me at first with great pain of mind to decline it; but they then made a second application, offering that a clerk of the press should be hired to take those duties (in relation to advertisements, etc.) which must be performed by some one on the spot, and that I should pay him out of the £160 and receive the difference myself. This I accepted.’ De Quincey’s salary was finally fixed at one guinea a week; and he took charge of the *Gazette* on July 11. The first number under his command appeared on 18 July 1818.<sup>15</sup>

## v

His editorship can hardly be called successful. It was his first direct connexion with a journal of any sort. He, of all men perhaps, had the least practical idea of what should go into a local party paper to interest and educate the provincial districts. His mind, attracted by metaphysics and the recondite, was hardly fitted for strictly popular discussion; his logical and long-drawn thought lacked incisiveness for political

<sup>14</sup> Page, I, 206.

<sup>15</sup> He writes to his uncle that the position is ‘certain for at least four years to come; and this I can retain at any distance.’ Does this imply that he thought of conducting the paper from London if, as he said in the letter to Wordsworth, he transferred himself thither at the end of a year to practise law?



blows; but, above all, his constitutional unreadiness and slow composition were handicaps which made him adopt many makeshifts not to the advantage of the *Gazette*, however amusing they may be today to the person who turns the faded yellow pages of the old files in the dingy office overlooking the picturesque Kendal street.

In the *Gazette* for 1 August 1818,<sup>16</sup> we have the first indication of one of the changes De Quincey made in the make-up of the *Gazette*. The number contained no editorial matter and hardly any general and local news. Instead there were long reports of the assizes in Yorkshire, Hertford, Salisbury, Wilts, and Winchester. Indeed, during his entire editorship, the assize news formed not only a prominent, but frequently an all absorbing, portion of available space. De Quincey's fascination for the grim and ghastly, later shown in his famous papers on *Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts*, appeared not only in the detailed publication of trials all over the country, but in the careful selection of peculiarly mysterious and revolting cases. His prepossession necessitated frequent apologies for the omission of really important news and communications.

It is easy to guess why he allowed himself to draw so heavily upon such material. He had an almost morbid interest in it, himself; and such matter was easy to gather and to throw together at the last moment without too much exertion. He himself gave reasons for emphasizing the assize news, though clearly they were drawn *ex post facto*; 'because,' he wrote, 'to the more uneducated classes they yield a singular benefit, by teaching them their social duties in the first impressive shape; that is to say, not in a state of abstraction from all that may explain, illustrate, and enforce them (as in the naked terms of the Statute): but exemplified (and, as the logicians say, *concreted*) in the actual circumstances of an interesting case, and in connection with the penalties that accompany their neglect or their violation; . . . [and] because they present the best indications of the moral condition of society.'

<sup>16</sup> I must here make a general acknowledgement of my indebtedness throughout this section to the important *brochure* upon *De Quincey and the Westmorland Gazette* by Mr. Charles Pollitt, a later editor of the paper.

But his mind was not easy about the *Gazette*. In the issue of 12 September 1818, he proposed a 'Plan for improving and exalting the Paper into a philosophical Journal' — for the assizes were drawing to a close. Perhaps his suggestion was in part a justification for a metaphysical article in the same number — obviously printed because he happened to have it on hand; for he wrote to Wordsworth apologizing 'for the metaphysicizing article which occupied the chief place in the penultimate Paper' — he was writing on September 27 — 'or rather for having placed it in that situation. The truth is, this was not my doing: it was a mistake of Mr. Kilmer's: I meant it to have been thrown into a corner. For I am and always have been convinced that the leading article should be in a popular tone on a popular subject: and, if I were not so convinced, I should yet not have treated your advice so lightly as to repeat (and in an aggravated way, inasmuch as it was much longer) the very error of which you had justly complained before. — No man in future will ever have to tax me with obscurity: I hope to be too intelligible for the peace of the Broughamites.'<sup>17</sup>

There were other apologies and programmes. In May 1819 we have a Communication to the Readers of the *Gazette*, delayed for one week after it was promised by want of room, and for a second week by an accidental failure to catch the post at Ambleside. 'Without making any change for the present in the proportions of the paper (which he does not feel disposed to do without express warrant from the Proprietors) — and assuming therefore that two columns and a half are disposable every week for the business of a literary and philosophical journal, — he designs to fill that space with four classes of articles, viz. I, with Statistical Tables — British and Continental. — II, With Original Essays. — III, With a Horologium collected from the most unfrequented parts of European Literature (especially English). — IV, Chiefly translations from the best parts of German Literature, and more rarely from German Philosophy.' And on 29 March 1819 came another promise: —

'Notice. — The Editor will open the Journal of which he

formerly gave notice on Saturday June 12th: the first number will contain the following articles: — 1. Immanuel Kant in England, or a letter to a friend on the study of Transcendental Philosophy; with some account of the English Exponents — The Edinburgh Review, Mr. Coleridge, and others. — 2. Mode of valuating Money in the Continental Mints.

'The second number will contain: — Hints towards a history of gold and silver. — 2. The Planet Uranus. — 3. Memorabilia from the Pocket Book of a Scholar.

'The third number will contain: — 1. An analysis of Two Essays by Wolf and Kant on the introduction of mathematical conceptions into philosophy. 2. Earthquake.' These plans were never carried out; but the topics proposed are almost a perfect epitome of what he later wrote on Philosophy, Economics, Autobiography.

If De Quincey did not carry out any consistent programme, he ran in now and then articles which, if somewhat heavy for the 'statesmen of Westmorland, he was not ashamed to revise in later years. Thus he printed in November and December, 1818, three sections of an article, *The Danish Origin of the Lake Country Dialect*, which in somewhat changed form was published in *Titan* in 1857; and certain essays on Kant appeared which were the nucleus of the group of papers on the philosopher of Koenigsberg which bulks so large in his collected works.<sup>18</sup> The major work of the *Gazette* was political, as was necessarily the case in a paper maintained to take the offensive against radicalism, especially as upheld in a bitter rival sheet, *The Kendal Chronicle*.

The letters to Wordsworth in the spring of 1818 show how warmly De Quincey felt during the contest which ended at the polls on 10 July 1818 in victory for the Lowther interests. The heat of controversy had somewhat cooled, however, when De Quincey took the editor's chair on July 11; but Brougham

<sup>18</sup> Mr. Findlay reports that De Quincey told him that he offered the study of the *Danish Origins of the Lake Country Dialect* to Wordsworth for his *Guide to the Lake Country*, but that 'Wordsworth who never liked to be obliged to anybody for anything, declined it; and, he added, Wordsworth 'declined it in his usual discourteous manner.' (Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 156.)

had declared that 'the Lowthers would have to meet him there at every election while he lived. If he died, they would not be secure of their prey, for a flame would break forth from his ashes which would utterly consume their oppressors.' The campaign, therefore, was a perennial one; and the future must be met by education and agitation. The spirit of eagerness and intemperance which we found in the letters to Wordsworth was still with him; and even granting the temper of political controversy in those remote days, we must admit that De Quincey showed a violence hardly becoming a philosopher and scholar. He was assailed by the rival paper as a 'venal scribbler,' an 'old Jacobin,' and 'a degraded character'; but De Quincey gave as good as he got.<sup>19</sup> His natural Toryism was whipped to excessive expression partly by the excitement of the moment and partly to meet the demands of his Committee — even to the extent of exceeding them! <sup>20</sup> There certainly seem to have been no criticisms from his supporters as to his opinions and political articles. Property and Royalty were upheld in his leaders in eloquent periods; Fox and Bonaparte were denounced with vigour; Catholic Emancipation was opposed; even the Peterloo Massacre was defended as right in principle, if unfortunate in

<sup>19</sup> To his credit be it said, however, that he now and then felt he had gone too far, and apologized or retracted. Thus, for instance, in the issue of 16 January 1819, he wrote to 'Q. in a Corner' who had attacked him, 'The Editor has drawn up a letter of apology to this writer for an intemperate expression which escaped him in reference to a passage relating to her Majesty, which it now appears that he has misinterpreted. "Q" has himself taken no slight licence of sneer and even of misrepresentation: but that did not reconcile the Editor to an expression of anger and discourtesy which, if he had had time to read over his paper *once* before he sent it to press, he would certainly have cancelled as inconsiderate and unjust.' (Pollitt, p. 22.) And in that same issue of January 16, in a particularly forgiving spirit, he proposed 'an act of amnesty' by both the rival papers for all past offences. While this better feeling of De Quincey came to the fore now and then, the general tone was that of victory at any price.

<sup>20</sup> De Quincey claimed that he maintained independence of thought through all this political excitement. Two or three years later, Woodhouse quotes him: *The Westmorland Gazette* was 'set up with a view of supporting the Lowther interest. "But," said he, "I so managed it as to preserve my independence, and it happened that during the year and a half that I was the conductor of the paper, the name of Lowther was scarcely ever mentioned in the leading articles."' (Garnett, p. 196.) And in another place De Quincey goes on 'to show how little he was of a client (to use an Horatian expression) of Lord Lowther; whom, indeed, he had never seen above twice, and then at election dinners.' (Garnett, p. 205.)

result; on the whole the magistrates 'have discharged their duty under trying circumstances in a way satisfactory to the country'; and the Radicals in general were denounced in the most sanguinary diatribes. There are few philosophical views as to politics involved in these editorials; and they now read with the sense of dull futility common to most over-past political controversies.

Wordsworth appears to have been a friend and helper throughout, and the evidence would show that he did his best to make De Quincey's editorship, and the paper generally, a success. Wordsworth contributed under the name of 'Philadelphus,' and perhaps other pseudonyms; he countenanced the printing of a number of sonnets for the first time in the columns of the *Gazette*. But there were from the first recurring misunderstandings, if not irritating 'bickerings,' between the Editor and the Proprietors. The most constant difficulty arose from De Quincey's living so far away from the press. On one important occasion he was delayed in reaching the office because of heavy snow; he was not on hand to assure the proper selection of material. 'On reaching Kendal the Editor found that the columns of the *Gazette* were almost entirely pre-occupied by the matter which he had previously sent,' so that a particular article could not be inserted. Furthermore, he was constantly hampered by ill-health. So frequent were these hindrances and so persistent, that the situation finally grew tense. A minute in the records of the proprietors of the paper for 29 June 1819 reads as follows: — 'That an intimation be made to the Editor expressing their (i.e. the Proprietors') sentiments of the great importance of a regular communication between the Editor and the Proprietors of the *Westmorland Gazette* by want of which it appears that great inconvenience has frequently arisen from the exclusion of the latest London news; and the Committee trust that the Editor will take effectual measures in future to prevent a recurrence of that inconvenience which they conceive has arisen from his residing at so great a distance from the office. They also beg to suggest to the Editor the propriety of abstaining from direct remarks on any productions or observations which may appear in the *Kendal Chronicle*.' The

differences culminated that same autumn. The next minute is dated 'King's Arms, 5th. November, 1819.' It was resolved: — 'That Mr. De Quincey be respectfully informed that his resignation is accepted.' So closed the chapter. He had held the editorship for sixteen months.

## VI

DE QUINCEY was a Tory by natural instinct as well as by philosophical conviction. Throughout his life he was a close student of the political field. His interest, first recorded in connexion with Wordsworth's Cintra pamphlet, was primarily quickened by his absorption in the progress of the Napoleonic struggle in Spain and, by necessary implication, in the conduct of the war by the government in power. Naturally enough, he was an ardent hater of Bonaparte and of the French Revolution; and his essays are full of terms of dislike of everything French, even of French literature. One feels that the passions stirred in him during his young manhood when the French war was on, made him permanently unable to estimate with sympathy, or even with disinterested detachment, anything Gallic. But it was not until he broke forth in the over-wrought letters of 1818 which led to his editorship of the *Westmorland Gazette*, that we find him actually taking an active part on behalf of the Tory cause.

His fate led him later to close association with *Blackwood's*, a Tory magazine: and through this medium he was enabled to express his conservative views indirectly in notes and comments strewn through many an essay entirely unpolitical in intent, as well as directly through a considerable number of papers upon the actual political situations of the moment. These political papers were written with considerable regularity during most of De Quincey's association with the Blackwood house, papers from their very nature, of purely ephemeral interest; and since they have never been gathered together, they still lie anonymous and lost in the old files of 'Maga'. The Blackwoods evidently looked upon him as their star political writer. During the very time, however, that he was contributing to *Blackwood's Magazine*, he was earning

extra income by writing literary articles for the new liberal, or radical, magazine of Tait, to whose political principles he was outspokenly opposed. Yet it was in *Tait's Magazine* that the opportunity was offered him, in a moment of generous tolerance, for a paper of unusual solidity and weight upon *Toryism, Whiggism and Radicalism*, which was printed in 1837 accompanied by many objecting foot-notes from the pen, presumably, of Tait himself. This censorship, as it were, by Tait, angered De Quincey; and with the intent to answer Tait in his own magazine for the running notes in rebuttal of his original arguments, De Quincey wrote for a subsequent number a paper on *Political Parties in Modern England*. This, however, Tait was unwilling to print, so that it was not given to the world until after De Quincey's death. These two articles are the penetrating confessions of De Quincey's political belief, and upon them any consideration of that belief must stand.

Both of these essays have in full measure the firmness of De Quincey when he is writing with conviction of important truth, without padding, divagations, uncertain endings, and false emphases. 'Tough' and 'hard,' both in their best and in their original sense, describe the qualities of his polemical style; and they are peculiarly applicable here. He tells us that he laboured over them with particular pains, and they show it. They are masterly in clarity, coherence, and form; and were the subjects less weighty they would be frequently quoted as samples of a side of De Quincey's writings relatively little known but unmistakably powerful. Philosophical they are in intent, and in so far as the restrained passion of his convictions permit, they are philosophic in fact. They show penetrating analysis of political theory and development which is arresting even today. One can read them only with deep respect for the vigour and balance of the mind therein revealed. Here is conviction, here is power, very different from the feverish utterances of the period of his Kendal editorship. In them one catches an especially clear glimpse of the intellectual stature of the man.

His whole position is that of a conservative Englishman, firm in his respect and reverence for the British Constitution.

The Constitution, while he recognized its flexibility, was for him fixed in its essential features, in the relation of King, Aristocracy, and Parliament; and, implicit in this trinity of powers, developed historically and still organically a part of it, were the two political parties, the Tories and the Whigs. Coming to birth, as it were, in the revolution of 1688, these parties became necessary to the functioning of the Constitution itself. The King, as the pivot on which the whole machinery turns, is equally the object of protection by both Whig and Tory. They in turn are the organs by which the practical administration of affairs is conducted and regulated. In so far they are alike. The difference lies in this, namely, that the Whigs 'take charge of the popular influence, guide it and support it'; while the Tories 'take charge of the antagonist or non-popular influence, guide it and support it.' Logically, the entire field of possible politics is covered by these two parties. The parties are not to be looked upon as 'in a dispute between two contradictory views, where both cannot co-exist' and where either taken singly may be able to occupy the whole political field. Each is necessary for the existence of the other. 'Essentially they represent the total sphere of the Constitution, each representing one hemisphere. . . Both Tory and Whig must co-exist with the British Constitution.'

Here is a philosophic conception synthesizing party conflict. Hostility, differences of opinion, and struggle appear in the political arena only in the practical ordering of affairs and spring for the most part from *ad hoc* decisions usually divorced from fundamental Whig or Tory points of view. Only in so far as ultimate principles are involved in concrete matters is it right to speak of actions as strictly Tory or Whig; but more often the acts of the party in power or in opposition are unclassifiable in strict party terms. They are, in short, neutral and are to be justified merely on grounds of ethics or of expedience, not as Tory or Whig, at all.

But there are enough national questions left to be considered in the light of principles to keep a good Tory like De Quincey alert and warm. Democracy and the growing trend towards democracy filled him with alarm. He opposed



the extension of the franchise, the removal of Catholic disabilities, the adoption of the secret ballot. He looked with disfavour upon the Reform Bill of 1832; he disapproved anything which tended to lessen the influence of the landed interests. After he had taken up his stand on his philosophic thesis of complementary parties as essential to the Constitution, he could think and feel like any ordinary Tory who might lack philosophic foundations for his beliefs. At the same time, it must be conceded, his candour of mind, always active in his thinking, now and then recognized that his party was not always right and that Tory leaders occasionally strayed from the straight path of Toryism. However, even though he never again showed the unrestrained violence of his utterances in the *Westmorland Gazette* and in his letters of that unfortunate period, he remained to the end a vigorous partisan of the *status quo* solidly fixed in his conservative position.

It was inevitable with his beliefs that he should have looked with distrust upon the Radicals. They to him were no party at all; merely a conglomeration of dissatisfied individuals, each striving for some particular reform and yet all together unable to agree upon any intelligible programme. Logically, they had no existence as a party. There was no room for a third party in his scheme of things. Groups of the discontented, as the Radicals were, coalescing with the old parties for momentary ends as immediate interests dictated, were in the very nature of the case ephemeral. De Quincey was enunciating the common idea that England is completely wedded to the two party system and must always cling to it; and in the experience of the past century, one may find confirmation of his contention. Names have changed, but the eternal duality of the political struggle has continued. Meanwhile, the strength of the radical groups of his time, the encroachment of democratic demands upon British policy, the decay, as he saw it, of gentility in Parliament and the government, the compromises with the effervescing mob — all these brought to him discouragement and despair in so far as a heart so loyally British could permit his faith in British prestige and destiny to be threatened. Especially in his later

decades did this distrust of the future find not infrequent expression.

It is notable that in those portions of his works which touch upon political matters he is silent as to most of the problems which sprang from the industrial revolution; adequate representation in Parliament, labour conditions, including unemployment, increasing poverty, the rise of labour unions, and countless others. He hated Manchester and the rest of the great industrial centres with their smoke and their commercial and materialistic outlook. It is strange, then, that he should not have responded more sympathetically to the needs of the victims of the industrial system. He felt for the poor, he had had ample opportunity to observe conditions as he travelled back and forth through the heart of England; he was a close student of Political Economy; yet nowhere does he give adequate attention to the changed and changing conditions of society; and nowhere does he recognize fully the need of new political and social programmes to meet the terrible situation which by 1837 had already begun to stir the British conscience.

## VII

A GUINEA a week was but a small addition to an income already totally inadequate for supporting a growing family, and by December 1818, matters had become desperate in the De Quincey household. Out of his necessity De Quincey wrote that long letter on his financial straits already quoted. We must now turn back to it.<sup>21</sup>

This letter, or rather two drafts for this letter which are all we have, was written in answer to his mother's criticism of his life and habits and shows signs of the irritations under which he was labouring. In one draft he wrote:

'I do not purpose however now to trouble you with any comments upon the apparent spirit of the particular passages of your letter: my purpose at present is to ask a favour, and to suggest a mode by which you can grant it in a way that will not distress yourself and will be the most serviceable to me. Though

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Japp in the *Memls.*, II, 111 ff. prints two different drafts for the letter as one. He also omits passages without warning; and has even added occasional sentences which are not in the MS. (BS. MSS.)

your letter is obviously written under the influence of some anger (by what occasioned, I am altogether at a loss to guess), yet I take it for granted that it must have been merely temporary, let it have been caused by what it might, and that you will be as ready now as I have found you heretofore to give me your assistance. — That I may explain the nature of my application the more fully and intelligibly, it will be useful for me to give you a sketch of my past life and intentions as connected with this subject.

' When I was a boy, I was possessed by that kind of ambition which with most people is the highest that they ever attain: I planned and projected constantly, in the ordinary spirit of ordinary minds, to raise myself to high stations and honours in the state. With boyhood these purposes forsook me: and I gradually substituted a different ambition (if I may call *that* ambition which in no degree partook of the feelings which belonged to vulgar worldly ambition — being wholly disconnected from all love of applause) : my ambition was — that, by long and painful labour combining with such faculties as God had given me, I might become the intellectual benefactor of my species. I hoped and have every year hoped with better grounds that, (if I should be blessed with life sufficient) I should accomplish a great revolution in the intellectual condition of the world; that I should both as one cause and as one effect of that revolution place education upon a new footing, throughout all civilized nations, was but one part of this revolution: it was also but a part (though it may seem singly more than enough for a whole) to be the first founder of true Philosophy: and it was no more than a part that I hoped to be the re-establisher in England (with great accessions) of Mathematics. It would be altogether useless for my purpose to stop here to justify myself for entertaining such hopes; and in fact impossible; such hopes can be justified in no other way than by their realization. In that way I trust that more or less they will be justified. It would also be no use to attempt defending my plans against the sneers — with which you must allow me to say from a review of your past correspondence for many years (and I say it with no shadow of anger) you have hitherto treated my plans of this nature coming from me even when less broadly and comprehensively alluded to. If I fail in my great purposes which I have so long pursued, — the failure will be grief enough; and it cannot add any stings to it that such or such a person has sneered at me: mortification from contempt will altogether be swallowed up in mortification or (to express it by a fitter word) the sorrow of failure. I mention these hopes now merely as explanatory of my past life. It followed naturally that a person, who pursued objects so really

great, could not have much disposable ambition for the puerile greatness attached to high stations in life. Accordingly for some years my thoughts never wandered in that direction.'

He went on, 'I could not indeed but feel surprised that you, who understand Christianity, should even on religious grounds think it right to attach so much importance to professional pursuits and to external temporary honour: I think that you will yourself admit that if I had pursued the law in the usual way and were now Mr. Sergeant this — Mr. Justice that — or my lord Chief Baron so and so, you would not treat me in the way you do in your letters nor as you have often done in acts to me when present: for instance, you would scarcely have addressed me, if I had been a member of Parliament or a distinguished Barrister or a judge or Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the tone which you hold in your last letter which addressed me sometimes as a baby and sometimes as a poor crazy nervous decayed gentleman boarded out by his friends in a retired situation where he may sit brooding and moping by the fireside and not disgrace his family by a more public exhibition. If I, instead of labouring for years to mature a great scheme of philosophy and education, had pushed myself forward in the path of common vulgar ambition, and had risen to the honours which lie in those paths, — I am sensible that I should have experienced a very different treatment from all my female relations: and yet the actual difference between what on that plan I should have been and what I now am must be much in my favour: for whosoever gives himself up to law zealously must be very ignorant of most things which it is truly honourable to know. But there are not many minds that are not in captivity to external things: and, if you will allow me to say so, no women that are not: I do not doubt but that Lord Bacon and Milton were both more respected by their wives for the public offices which they held than for those great endowments which have made them venerable names to posterity: I need not say that I make this reference by way of illustration merely; and not as though their cases were strictly analogous to mine.'

In the second draft which phrases somewhat differently the same general ideas, he continued the history of his growing poverty after 1815. But just before he came to this, he stopped for a digression 'in justice to my wife' which, unfortunately, is missing in the MS. He then continued:

'Marriage brought with it many expenses: — we have had two children: the elder, a boy born on Nov. 9, 1816 — and therefore now more than two years old: as a joint memorial of affection for my brother and school-fellow I had him bap-

tised by the name of William Penson: the younger, a girl, born on June 5 of this year and therefore now rather more than six months old, her, as a just expression of affection for my wife, I had baptised by her name. — The expenses of living, which by two confinements of my wife and two sicknesses (one a fever, the other a long and painful affection of the breast) — by keeping an additional servant — and by the children's clothes, etc. were of course much increased, I have hitherto supported by my pen, — only that I have received during three years £124 in aid (viz. a loan of £40 from my sister Jane in 1817, and a present of £84 this year through you from my Uncle). I should still have been able to go on very well and gradually might have saved a sum sufficient for my law pursuits but for an unfortunate bad state of health which seized upon me in the latter end of last year, and has not yet left me. In October of last year I was bit three times running by a dog when sitting in a room: and this being followed by some strange and painful sensations some weeks after, I suffered for a long time under fear of hydrophobia. This may or may not have been the first origin of the long illness under which I have languished: be that as it may, it has been sufficient to incapacitate me from all considerable exertions.

#### Consequences.

'I am now in arrears to various creditors to the amount of £150 which must be paid, in part (50£) almost immediately — in the other part about Candlemas (Feb. 14) next. — If this were paid, I have nothing which would enable me to transfer my family to London for the pursuit of the law.

#### Application founded on this Statement.

'On account of my family I wish to avoid prison. — I know of no person to whom I can apply except yourself; and I apply with the less reluctance to you, because I think I can point out a way which will enable you to assist me without inconvenience to yourself. — Your security would at any time raise a much larger sum than I need in the way of a loan: — but how, you will say, is the interest of this money to be paid? You may be sure that I must have various means of obtaining money — to have supported my family so long: . . . ' The rest is lost.

Mrs. Quincey replied on 23 December 1818,<sup>22</sup> with her accustomed generosity. She would procure the sum of £160 within a week or ten days, a loan from Colonel Penson, on which Thomas must pay interest at the rate of five per cent

<sup>22</sup> *Mems.*, II, 119 ff.

a year. She then proceeded to comment on that missing passage about De Quincey's wife: 'Let me at once assure you we all think there can be but one reasonable view taken of the condition in life which you have described your Wife's to be, and that view is the same as yours, that it is a happy and respectable one, and we are greatly rejoiced to find that she has dignified it by her conduct, as well as that she answers your wishes as a Companion and a Wife.'

Meantime, during the autumn of 1818, De Quincey had written directly to his uncle for a loan.<sup>23</sup> He was endeavouring to put the best face possible upon his financial situation; for he was asking for £500, and it was well to establish a conviction of security as to its repayment. Persuasion went the length of inaccuracy and came close to fiction. But the passage presents the opportunities of literary effort which were doubtless open to him had he been able to bestir himself to take advantage of them. *The Westmorland Gazette* was the first source of income enumerated; and he went on to enumerate others:

'2. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* allows me to write as much as will produce 60 guineas a year. For the late months, I have had my time too much occupied with the newspaper to be at liberty for any labour in that work, and have been too ill almost to manage the newspaper. However, I have compelled myself to work so much that the circulation of the paper is now much increased.' — Here he frankly admitted that he had not written for *Blackwood's*. Wilson had undoubtedly been the means of making an offer to him; but there is no evidence that he contributed anything to *Blackwood's* as early as this.

'3. The *Quarterly Review* has allowed me to write what has yielded 120 guineas a year. Mr. Murray, the publisher, sent me a work for reviewal four months ago (the entire works of Schiller in 26 vols.), and it is still lying here, I am sorry to say, untouched; for the same reasons as I assigned in the last case, I have not been able to touch it.'

The present Mr. John Murray assures me that there is no evidence among the records of his house that De Quincey ever contributed to the *Quarterly*. The £120 a year which he speaks of, is merely the possible amount he might earn if he wrote regularly for the magazine.

<sup>23</sup> Erroneously dated 1819, Page, I, 206.

'These three sources,' he proceeded, 'will produce 232 guineas (or £243, 12s) per annum. This added to my warehouse rent, will be £260.' The warehouse rent, his last remaining income from his paternal fortune, was thus about £18.<sup>24</sup>

The whole story of these long months of 1818-9 is one of outbursts of excitement and vituperation, instability, desperate attempts at tact running to unveracity, erratic handling of the *Gazette*, irresponsibility, all reflecting not the real De Quincey, but the drugged and desperate De Quincey of this terrible period.

<sup>24</sup> There is one further hint of possible literary production earlier, namely in 1815. His mother, in a letter of 9 September 1815 (*Memls.*, II, 109) writes to De Quincey, 'We never had a *Courier*. Was it because your Papers never appeared, or that the editor forgot us?'

CHAPTER XIII  
THE FIRST CONNEXION WITH  
*BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE*

1819-1821

I

THE NECESSITY of earning a living was driving De Quincey to write. It is clear that hitherto he had not been instinctively moved to authorship. In his early diary he was longing to produce; but he did not. The dramas, novels, poems which he projected were aspirations only, the aspirations of any young man of literary tastes. The following years showed him to be the student rather than the creative writer. At Oxford and the period following his stay there, he was a passionate reader, studying with an intensity and thoughtfulness so keen that he stored up in his tenacious memory material ready for use during the rest of his life, material which he could draw upon with a fullness and accuracy which is little short of miraculous. But for many years he seems to have had, in spite of such mental activity, little thought of actual writing. His prepossessions were chiefly with the abstract realms of thought; in a vague sort of way, and with something of an uneasy conscience urging upon him that he owed it to the world to make use of what he recognized was unusual learning and unique originality of analysis, he planned to produce some great work, a reconstruction of philosophy, a new mathematics, a reform of the systems of education. For twenty years he pondered such a *magnum opus*. But this great plan, or these great plans, remained to the end inchoate. In short, until the bitter need of money in 1818, and after, literally drove him to seek a living by means of his pen, there is no indication that he had ever written seriously, even though he had doubtless composed fragments and perhaps stray chapters. Certainly he had not published. Perhaps he was unable to satisfy his own self-criticism; he was certainly ill; his indulgences in opium



inhibited continuous effort; but the real difficulty was an inability to bring his will to a focus, to overcome an habitual intellectual procrastination.

When his hand was forced, and he turned to writing, the great works of his ambitions faded into the region of the impossible. The themes for which he had been preparing himself were not, or seemed at the moment not to be, available. To win the recognition of editors, he needed popular, or semi-popular subjects. Instead of impressive outlay, he must spend his mental wealth in small sums. He became strictly a magazine writer; and with the exception of one novel, and a small volume on Political Economy, the great dreams of his youth became shattered into the fragments of occasional papers, written almost entirely on the spur of the moment, too often of merely temporary value and of uneven excellence and interest. They won for him fame, indeed, but, as it were, precariously and almost accidentally; and then largely by their style or strange subjects, quite apart from the major interests of his intellectual life which he had originally hoped to illuminate and adorn. It was not by learned disquisitions that he impressed his name upon literary history, but by accounts of his strange and terrible opium experiences and by his personal memories of greater men than he; by his autobiographical reconstructions, fitful critical inspirations, and imaginative flights. He became a man of letters, a figure in English prose, almost in spite of himself.

## II

PRICKED by the sting of poverty and in spite of repeated declarations that he intended to go to London, he turned instead to Edinburgh, where the possibilities of contributing to *Blackwood's Magazine* were open to him.<sup>1</sup> The prospect was hopeful, and he wrote of the encouraging possibilities to his family at Wrington; so that on 31 May 1819, Jane replied to him: — 'I hope you will be able to write. — I think 10 guineas a sheet would make me do wonders.' And she

<sup>1</sup> Of his connection with *Maga*, founded in 1817, we shall have much to say, because for that magazine he wrote longer than for any other, and, also, because, fortunately, his abundant correspondence with the Blackwoods is preserved entire.

added, evidently in comment upon some words of Thomas in a preceding letter, 'And after all, the performances which you might execute with the least satisfaction to yourself would often be read with very different feelings by those whose spirits and interest in the subjects were more alive. Moreover, if you only get fairly into the midst of *something*, I should think exertion would more and more quicken your powers and make you forget your maladies.' <sup>2</sup>

Difficulties always drove De Quincey to increased doses of opium; they in turn lessened his ability to write — a vicious circle; and the inexorable expenses of a family bore steadily upon him. The cordial friendship which had made it possible for Wilson to borrow from De Quincey in 1813, now in 1819 made it possible for De Quincey to borrow from Wilson: to such an extent, indeed, that Wilson cried out in despair. Wilson had been forced to borrow with terrible difficulty many months before to pay some bills of De Quincey's against him for £40; he had been forced to refuse to honour two bills for £20; and later still, others. He was himself in direst straits; he had sold his books, he had narrowly escaped imprisonment for debt, and he *could* not do more. He summed it all up: — 'being in debt to the very lips, these last two 25 pounds, £50, and the previous £40 = £90, have done me up: and I scarcely see how I can avoid bankruptcy.' <sup>3</sup> But Wilson was, none the less, friendly, even though, ten months later, De Quincey drew bills against him which Wilson again could not meet.

Yet De Quincey's efforts to write were futile, or ineffective. In March 1820 Wilson wrote: 'Unless something has occurred to make it impossible for you to send yr. contribution as you solemnly promised when we parted, no doubt you wd. have done so. But I can never again mention the subject to Mr. Blackwood, who delayed the printing of the work [the magazine] several days on my assurance of a packet coming from you.' <sup>4</sup> De Quincey delayed, Wilson urged; but Wilson's anxiety was not merely for De Quincey's sake. 'It becomes daily a more difficult task for Mr. Lockhart and I [sic] to

<sup>2</sup> *Memls.*, II, 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Memls.*, II, 41; March 1820.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 42.

write almost the whole of the work, and when he is married it is not possible that for some months afterwards he can be in Edinburgh or at leisure to write. Your assistance is becoming, therefore, every day more desirable, and I have only to add that payment at the rate of £10 10s. a sheet shall be monthly transmitted for your communications along with yr. Numbers of the Magazine. This I again pledge myself to do, and for the last time; for were I again to reiterate, I feel that I should be forcing the task upon you. Whatever and whenever you send, it shall be inserted, and nothing can ever come wrong.’<sup>5</sup> Wilson with unbounded faith in De Quincey must have urged him upon Blackwood and Lockhart as the man of power and brilliance they needed: and yet he must have done so with but little grounds for his faith beyond his friend’s conversation, his articles in *The Westmorland Gazette*, and perhaps certain fragments of writing which Wilson may have read. But clearly Wilson loved De Quincey, these early letters show that; and with his enthusiastic nature he saw through the eyes of friendship the remarkable man De Quincey really was.

If on March 22 the contribution to *Blackwood’s* was not forthcoming; so also on August 5 another was withheld, a review of Malthus.<sup>6</sup> ‘It is now the 5th. of August,’ Wilson wrote, ‘and I am beginning to fear that something may have occurred to stop your composition. *Ebony* [i.e. Blackwood], who is the child of Hope and Fear, and who has shown a face of smiles for some days, begins to droop excessively; and if the article does not come soon, do doubt will commit suicide, . . . Two sheets of the magazine was a promise that raised the mortal to the skies; so do not draw the devil down!’ And he closed the same letter: — ‘In what I have said about your articles for the Magazine, do not imagine that I have any intention — however remote — of doubting that you will send them *if you can*. That, however, I know, does, with all men, depend on a thousand circumstances. I tried to convince Blackwood that you never *had engaged* to write for the Magazine, and his face was worth ten pounds — for it was as pale as a sheet. — I told him, however, that now

<sup>5</sup> *Mems.*, II, 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 43.

you *were* engaged, so that if the articles don't come now, he will become a sceptic even in religion, and end in total disbelief of Earth, Heaven and Hell.' <sup>7</sup> Still there appeared no article; no written sheet reached Blackwood; and Blackwood himself wrote De Quincey on August 26 [1820],<sup>8</sup> 'It is a remark warranted by reason, not to mention a higher sanction, that "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." I shall still, however, hope against hope that you will yet fulfill your long bygone engagement to the Magazine. I am the more encouraged to expect this from what you mentioned in a letter to the Professor the other day. Whatever you choose to send, whether long or short, will always be acceptable.'

## III

THEN suddenly, somewhere in early December, Thomas De Quincey appeared in Edinburgh. All we know is, that on December 9 the journey was a *fait accompli*. We have a short note written from Edinburgh to his wife, his 'Dearest Margaret,' and from the whole tone of the letter, we gather that he had just arrived. 'I snatch one minute to tell you that I am tolerably well — much better, at least, than when I left home — and that all is going well. All my friends here are more kind than I can express. Without any trouble on my part, they have procured me lodgings, books, and everything that I can wish, or rather ten times more. And invitations crowd so fast upon me that I hardly know how I shall get through all my writing, etc. In the course of to-morrow, I will write a *long* letter to you; . . . Write a few lines to me by *Wednesday's* post to say that all is going on well, no matter how little. Give my best love to the children, and believe me, with kind remembrances to Mary, yours, my dear Peggy, most faithfully and affectionately, Thomas De Quincey.' Then in a postscript: — 'Southey was kind and polite beyond even anything I expected, though he was always as much so as anybody I ever knew.' De Quincey had evidently stopped at Greta Hall on his way; perhaps spent a night there.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Memls.*, II, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Oliphant, *William Blackwood and His Sons*, (1897-8), I, 424.

<sup>9</sup> *Page*, I, 218.

De Quincey had not been in Edinburgh since 1815. Now he returned to pick up again the acquaintance of many of the men of letters of the northern capital.

## IV

DE QUINCEY went to Edinburgh in 1820 to write for Blackwood; and by good fortune the letters between him and his employer are preserved to give the story of his short stay.

On December 9 he had newly arrived. The first letter to Blackwood was, apparently, that of December 12. He had been expected in time to furnish copy for the January issue of *Maga*; but he came later than was desired, and Blackwood had written him a note expressing impatience. In answer we have the following from De Quincey:

Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood

30 Northumberland Street,  
Tuesday morning. (Dec. 12, 1820)

Dear Sir,

I *do* 'keep my word' — not 'once' merely, but always — when I am aware that it is pledged. The best way therefore for us in all cases will be after any conversation to say to each other — Now let us not part without understanding how far any formal engagement (and if any, what engagement precisely) has been contracted between us. In the present case, I cannot be in any doubt as to my view on this point — though it seems that you took a different view of it. Which of us is right, I will not take upon myself to say: but here is my conscientious belief about it up to the moment when I saw Professor Wilson yesterday morning. — I had always understood that the 10th. was the latest day on which anything could be received with any chance of publication in the forthcoming Number. Under this impression I took care to be in Edinburgh time enough before that day to allow of my writing a sheet: and I put myself to some inconvenience and an extra expense of 3½ guineas in post-chaises, that I might be in time for producing so much. Consequently one of my first questions was — Am I in time with one sheet for *this* month's Magazine? Meaning, if I *was* in time, to sit down there and then — to call on no soul until it was finished — scarcely to sleep, if that should be necessary. But this question I found it impossible to resolve — whether through you, or through Wilson. 'Never mind about that' — you both said: the Mag. is always going on: it cannot

come amiss: etc. and so on. Doubtless, thought I, sometime or other the article will be printed, if it is approved. But, if I have lost my pains and needlessly thrown away money in hastening up now — when a week hence would have been soon enough (or perhaps even 3 weeks), why should I sit up night and day to produce a few days earlier what after all may lie in a drawer for 10 days or a fortnight after it is sent? — Having talked with you, I pressed Wilson and Gillies on this point: neither could assure me that it was even possible for me to be inserted this month. Eight pages, the former said dubiously, might get in perhaps: he did not exactly know. 'But what signifies that,' said they, 'if you are paid immediately?' First, that I should write with more spirit — being sure of an early insertion. Secondly, as to money, it is clear that I can be allowed to write more in two numbers (that for this month, and that for next) than for one only. If I have lost the chance for the forthcoming No., all motive for instant and unceasing exertion and thought is done away with.

To this account I have only to add 3 memoranda:

1. In spite of my disappointment here explained, in respect to the No. immediately forthcoming — I *have* been writing keenly: and I hope to send you something in the course of the day: but at latest (and here I am *promising*) by to-morrow forenoon.

2. *I have lost a good deal of labour* by having begun upon an article from Schiller, prefaced by a view of Schiller's character, etc., which by mere accident Gillies informed me had already been published in an early No. of the Mag.. It was the story of Christian Wolf.

3. You remember something about Saturday and Monday: so Gillies tells me. Now my remembrance is this: De Q. — Pray, Mr. Blackwood, am I in time if I send you some sheets (of letter paper) down by Sat. — Mr. B. — Oh! never mind about the time: Send them then, or if not then on Monday morning. De Q. — Very well.

I am, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

Thomas De Quincey.

I had not room to bring in my closing words at the end of my note: they are these. I have fixed a time, as you will see, for my first article. Now when I once begin, I never leave off. And therefore, as money is by no means disagreeable to me at this moment, I wish you would allow me to apply to our connexion this line of Macbeth's

'And damned be he who first cries — Hold, enough.'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bl. MSS.; and Oliphant, *William Blackwood and His Sons*, (1897-8), I, 429 ff.

Then followed, later on the same day, a letter from Blackwood, the general tenor of which can be inferred from De Quincey's answer:

Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood

Tuesday. [12 December 1820]

Dear Sir,

As I have the pen in my hand, and your messenger says he was to wait for an answer (which direction possibly you gave him under a slight feeling that I might even now be ready for you), — I write a few lines.

From your hint about long letters, — I fear you think I may waste my time in that way. In this you misconceive my ordinary practice. You assign two excellent reasons for not writing long ones yourself: — and just at this moment I have two also, and by accident the very same, for not writing any but the very shortest — viz. not to consume my own time and still less yours. — Men of the world nowadays, as we both know, never write long letters: so much have postoffices and other civil arrangements multiplied the number of claims upon every man standing like you in a public situation. If therefore I troubled you with a long letter this morning (as I certainly *did*), — it was because the case taken in connection with all that had passed previously seemed to me to demand it. This was one reason: another was — that I had some obscure feeling that by the *length* of this letter I might do something to balance the want of attention to the *number* (whether 2 or 3) of yours with which you have hitherto favoured me: — to all persons in the world except Prof. Wilson (my own family *not* excepted) Opium has reduced me for the 6 last years to one general discourtesy of utter silence. But this I shall think of with not so much pain, if this same opium enables me (as I think it will) to send you an article not unserviceable to your magazine.

If Mr. Bell (the Surgeon) had not been with me — as also Wilson and Gillies — this morning, you would have had an article to-night. As it is, on Saturday you shall have too much.

I remain my dear Sir, yours faithfully,

Thos. De Quincey.

To-morrow morning you shall have what I promised.<sup>11</sup>

It is to be noticed that the letter just given makes the earliest mention that we have of an article on his experiences with opium. In other words, the *Confessions* was in December

1820 intended to be printed in *Blackwood's*; and it would have been so printed had not the break which was soon to follow, sent De Quincey off to London and *The London Magazine*.

The following letter gives a program of articles which De Quincey intended to furnish for *Maga*.

Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood.

Dear Sir,

I send you this *which in my hand contains twice as much as in that of most persons*. More I would have sent, if I could: but, with the interruptions I have had to-day, I could with difficulty do this. As to last night, it was spent much of it in searching for matter in Paul Richter's works: but this article I found would be too long for my first: and was obliged after some labour thrown away to abandon. I will make it my third therefore: — My Opium Art. being the 2nd..

To-night I shall finish the art. I now am on: if you happen to be sending down this way, your messenger may call *as early as he will* after daylight. — Then forthwith I shall go to the Opium, which I hope to have ready by Saturday morning. The Opium Article will be at least a sheet. The present art. from Schiller will I think be 4pp. of the Mag.

I am, dear Sir,

Faithfully yours,

Thomas De Quincey.

Wednesday. December 13 [1820.]

1. *Schiller* finished on Thursd. morning by eight o'clock.
2. *Opium* article finished, *I trust*, on one o'clock on Sat.
3. *Paul Richter* — finished on Monday evening, or afternoon, next.
4. *Mrs. Hannah More* on Wednesday or Thursday of next week.
5. *Kant* —
6. *Malthus, Say, Ricardo* — 12

Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood

Thursday, near 6 o'clock. [14 December 1820]

Dear Sir,

Last night I lost in this way: G. Bell the Surgeon now attends me; and by his advice I allowed myself to commence a course of regimen and medicine which at first going off made me very



ill indeed. I could do nothing but lie down; and not sleeping until morning I was not awake until your messenger called.

What I send is the product of my labour since breakfast — i.e.  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 1 o'clock — interrupted only by two visits. To-night I shall get on better: but I much regret having begun with this art. which with my care and fastidiousness in translation costs me 5 times more labour than original composition would do: I am persuaded that I could have written 10 pp. of my Opium art. whilst I have done these 2: for as all translation is a slow business with me, so this tale of Schiller's in particular happens to run into the English idiom with more than common reluctance.

Faithfully yours,  
Thomas De Quincey.

I send you this to show that I am going on. I shall not stir out till I have finished.<sup>13</sup>

The Schiller article was finished and ready by Monday instead of, as had been promised, by the preceding Thursday; but Blackwood was elated at having at last something from De Quincey's hand, and he immediately sent back a note of rejoicing.

William Blackwood to Thomas De Quincey

[18 December 1820]

I am so happy to receive anything from you that your two pages appear like the 24 of any one else, because, now that you are fairly begun, I feel confident that you will do justice to yourself. It was the knowing what you *could do* if you were once *resolved to do* which made my repeated disappointments so very mortifying to me. This is now all happily over, because, as the French say, the first step is the grand affair.<sup>14</sup>

Blackwood lost no time in securing a promising writer, a new man of power; for there followed a letter from De Quincey in which he mentions a definite contract to become one of the regular, not merely casual, contributors to the Magazine.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bl. MSS.

<sup>14</sup> Oliphant, I, 424.

<sup>15</sup> The letter is not dated either with day, month or year; but an endorsement by another hand dates it and probably correctly, 1 January 1820.

## Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood

Dear Sir,

I have not yet written a formal answer to express my readiness to accede to your proposal simply for this reason — that I have been very busy both for the Mag. and also for some private business of my own in the South; and I wished to draw up my engagement in terms of rigorous obligation. To-morrow however I will send you my *bond* (if I may so call it) selling myself soul and body to the service of the Magazine for two years (if that term is agreeable to you); and I will take care to word it distinctly and satisfactorily.

My immediate purpose in writing to you is this: — I am now finishing an article which will more than complete 16 pp. taken with the short one sent before: I know this, because I have made an experiment to determine what quantity of my ordinary handwriting goes to a column of the Mag. . . .<sup>16</sup>

But the promised articles lagged, and Blackwood's impatience found expression.

## William Blackwood to Thomas De Quincey

6 January, 1821.

I must tell you frankly at once that your mode of furnishing articles will neither answer your own purpose nor mine. For instance, this article which you have not yet finished you positively promised to have with me complete on Tuesday by two o'clock. No doubt you may have had many unavoidable causes for the delay: still, this is nothing to a man of business, who, as he adheres to his own engagements, expects equal punctuality in those who engage with him. It is quite unnecessary, as I have again and again told you, to make any inquiry as to whether the article will be in time. A good article is always in time.

I hope you will send me, as you again promised, the remainder of your article this evening, and the more you can do next week of any others so much the better.<sup>17</sup>

## Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood

Sat. night, Jan. 6. [1821]

My dear Sir,

I will not dispute with you: in this case I am gagged, having paid away your ten guineas the moment I received them; which I am now heartily sorry that I did.

<sup>16</sup> BL. MSS.

<sup>17</sup> Oliphant, I, 425.

I now send you 4 pp. more; the remainder (4 pp.) is written, if the printers could read it: but, as I fear they could not, I am copying as fast as possible: and, if you will let me know how late I can send up to-night, I will take care you shall have it.

'A good article,' you say, 'is always in time.' Well; mine is a good one: a very good one, and therefore in time. For he, who does not laugh at the whole latter part, especially from p. 8 to 20 is fit for treasons etc.

You make one mistake, indeed two, but I will notice only one: — I have had, you say, no doubt 'many unavoidable causes for the delay': — now in fact I have not — scarcely any at all excepting my own native stupidity: which I greatly regret, but cannot remedy. I move slowly whenever I am uncommonly witty. Nevertheless, if you are more particular, about quantity than quality, I am perfectly ready to oblige you by changing my style. But articles as droll as this, I really cannot produce faster: dull reviews, morality etc. and even wit such as some I saw in your December No. as fast as you please. In fact I have never left my paper except on Thursday once on account of Prof. Wilson — twice during the week to get some breakfast — dinner every day — and to write 3 letters this morning.

Yours very truly,  
Thos. De Quincey.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood.

Noon, Monday morning. [8 January 1821]

My dear Sir,

As you did not send me word *whither* and *how late* I might send on Saturday night, the MS. lay here all yesterday. For on Sunday I know not where any man's abode is. This morning I have only just got up: — from what I said on Sat. night I concluded you would send for it: but, as you have not, here it is — as soon as I have seen the light.

If Wilson and Lockhart do not put themselves forward for the Mag. I foresee that the entire weight of supporting it must rest on my shoulders: I see clearly that I must be its Atlas. For excepting our friend Gillies's translation (*from* a cursed dull thing though), and excepting that spirited political article at the end, a more dreary collection of dullness and royal stupidity never did this world see gathered together than the December No. exhibits. Positively it would sink any work in the world. No, no! I see clearly that I must write it all myself —

<sup>18</sup> Bl. MSS.; Oliphant, I, 426. I omit some technical discussion as to number of pages, etc. in the postscript in the original.

except one sheet which I will leave to Gillies and a few pp. to the other man.

And this horrible dullness, which is enough to inflict apoplexy, happens to coincide with those infernal articles from London. And to these it seems we are to knock under. What a craven the fellow must be who advised such a piece of devilish cowardice: whoever he be, I hope to God he may soon meet with a halter — even if it were my dear friend Prof. Wilson.

I am hard at work, being determined to save the Mag. from the fate which its stupidity merits.

Yours, my dear Sir, ever,  
Thomas De Quincey.<sup>19</sup>

Surely, De Quincey was in a high mood of gaiety, whatever may have been its cause. And while he was no doubt justified in jesting at the latest number of *Maga*, in so doing he took liberties which William Blackwood would not tolerate. The result was a note of withering protest.

William Blackwood to Thomas De Quincey

8 January, 1821.

I can only excuse your letter, which I received to-day, by supposing that you were hardly awake when you wrote it. When I apply to you to be the Atlas of my Magazine it will be time enough for you to undertake the burden. And in the meantime I must beg leave to say that if you cannot send me anything better than the 'English Lakes,' it will be quite unnecessary for you to give yourself any further trouble about the Magazine.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas De Quincey to William Blackwood

Tuesday morning, Jany. 9. [1821]

My dear Sir,

You are pleased to doubt whether I was awake when I wrote my note of yesterday morning: with a good deal more reason might I doubt whether the person were awake who either read my note or wrote the answer to it which I received last night. I shall not however enter into any dispute; and shall as little as possible in future, whether our connexion be long or short, trouble you with any notes at all — sleeping or waking.

If I expressed my opinion too freely (as it seems) on your magazine, — I did so in the firm belief

<sup>19</sup> Bl. MSS.; Oliphant, I, 427.

<sup>20</sup> Oliphant, I, 427.

First, that you must by this time be perfectly indifferent to the opinions of any one or of any thousand persons on the whole work even (much more on any single number) ;

And secondly, that the relation in which I stood (or fancied I stood) to the magazine, as a regular contributor elect, entitled me to any number of comments or of jokes on the work; (I myself being at all times tolerant of jokes, whether good or bad, on my own compositions). — In this I might be wrong; and, if I gave you any pain, I much regret it. On the other hand it does not appear to me that, if my MS. did not happen to suit your work, you were therefore entitled to favour me with your criticism upon it. The Magazine, which I criticised, was not (I believe) your own composition; and according to the usage of the world, if I took any liberty and some retort seemed to you necessary, I believe it would have been quite a sufficient one to throw back upon my hands the labour of a week.

As to my being ' the Atlas of your Magazine ' (though I suppose no person could gather from my note that such a post was the object of my *serious* ambition), you will give me leave to observe that on the supposition of being a contributor to that work — it could not depend either on your will or mine whether the readers of it should regard me in that light.

I have now only to add that I shall complete my 24 pp.; and you will of course exercise your discretion in determining whether they shall go into the Magazine.

I remain, my dear Sir,

Sincerely yours,

Thomas De Quincey.<sup>21</sup>

Blackwood was a peppery soul, although De Quincey had not fully realized it; and the exasperations of constant delays, capped by what he looked upon as flippant criticism of his beloved Magazine, brought forth wrath. On the other hand, De Quincey, who had come to the new work with obvious satisfaction, the more marked that he *had* brought himself to go to Edinburgh, *had* actually finished one article and saw his way to finishing many more, and *had* received and accepted a contract for two years to contribute to *Maga*, in mere exuberance of spirits had spoken sincerely, no doubt, and in evident fun, but to the wrong person and in the wrong way. He was startled; he saw the hope of recouping his fortune by his pen suddenly snatched from him. He might well have run to cover, even have withdrawn his remarks with abject

<sup>21</sup> Bl. MSS.; Oliphant, I, 428.

apologies; for his case was desperate. But instead, he wrote this last letter with manly regret at any pain he might have unintentionally caused, but not for a moment retracting.

Noticeable in all this interchange of letters is the clarity, the vigour of De Quincey's mind. The clouds that were darkening his life a year earlier had grown thin. Here, in a sort of miraculous way the man De Quincey again emerged. The *Confessions* were begun; he was ready for great things.

## V

WHAT happened next is left for inference. De Quincey soon quitted Edinburgh and returned to Grasmere. On 17 February 1821, Wilson addressed a letter to him there in which he expressed concern lest he might have been ill, since no word had been heard of him. He assumed that De Quincey was still intending to contribute to *Maga* — why did he not do so? — and that ill-health alone could have interfered.

'With respect to *Blackwood's Magazine*,' wrote Wilson. 'I do not think that I can press that subject upon you any more, for, if you cd. write for it, surely you would; and therefore I am bound to believe that some cause exists to prevent you. . . . God knows that yr. good is my object in having so often urged this request.'

There is impatience, almost exasperation here! All was not serene in the relations of the two men. Perhaps the reason is to be found in another protest by Wilson against De Quincey's habit of drawing bills upon him.

Wilson was trying to help him to the extent of his power; but he hoped for some return.<sup>22</sup> He had been elected Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, and he was not much of a philosopher. He was anxious about the lectures which he had to deliver, beginning early in November. And who better than De Quincey to give him help? Wilson had tried to enlist De Quincey to write eight lectures for him; and he prodded him.

'I am anxious to know from you, if you have done or still intend to do the 8 — for me before the 1st. of Novemr. I trust

<sup>22</sup> Wilson had asked De Quincey to write an address for him to be given at some club as early as 1816.

that you will. I wish you wd. write one or two on Cause and Effect' — the book of Dr. Brown, — 'but not unless you choose. I do not wish to say that by not fulfilling yr. promise of these 8 — you will distress me much, for perhaps it may distress you more to write them, but to trust to them and eventually be disappointed wd. be a most serious calamity to me.'

But there was no response.<sup>23</sup>

After De Quincey's return to Grasmere, when Edinburgh seemed closed to him, his mind must immediately have turned towards London; but he evidently had not the means, or the will, to stir. Months passed; and not until some time in June did he reach the metropolis.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Evidently Wilson had no knowledge of the fact that De Quincey had no intention of writing further essays for Blackwood. De Quincey had, moreover, evidently promised to write, or let Wilson think that he had promised to write, those eight lectures. Was there some secret resentment against Wilson in these silences? (*Memls.*, II, 47.)

<sup>24</sup> In a letter to J. A. Hessey, n.d. but presumably 1823-4 (Brit. Mus. MSS.), he spoke, in a deleted passage, of being 'in London for 7 months' in the year 1821. Since he left London on December 29, he must have arrived in June.

CHAPTER XIV  
THE LONDON MAGAZINE

1821-1823

I

IN JUNE 1821 De Quincey had gathered from some source enough money to start for London, without any preliminary connexion with a publisher, but armed merely with a letter from Wordsworth to Thomas Noon Talfourd, the distinguished barrister, best known to fame as the friend of Lamb and the author of the classical drama *Ion*. De Quincey had known Talfourd while studying law some seven or eight years before; but, characteristically, he felt unable after the lapse of years to claim help from him without a new introduction. Talfourd was friendly; and through him De Quincey was introduced 'to Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, who had very recently, upon the melancholy death of Mr. Scott, in consequence of his duel with Mr. Christie, purchased *The London Magazine*, and were themselves joint editors of that journal. The terms they held out to contributors were ultra-magnificent — more so than had yet been heard of in any quarter whatsoever; and, upon that understanding — seeing that money was just then of necessity, the one sole object to which [he] looked in the cultivation of literature — naturally enough it happened that to *them* [he] offered [his] earliest paper: <sup>1</sup> viz. "The Confessions of an English Opium Eater" — an article which he had had on the stocks in Edinburgh.

*The Confessions of an English Opium Eater, being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar* was published in two parts — the first in the number for September 1821; the second in October. It appeared anonymously; but the secret of authorship was not closely guarded. Its success was immediate, partly because of the startling nature of the subject, and partly because of its astonishing style. *The London Magazine* itself, in its satisfaction at having so notable a contribution be-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, III, 127 ff.



tween its covers, printed a preliminary and unusual word of commendation: — 'We are not often in the habit of eulogising our own work, but we cannot neglect the opportunity which the following explanatory note gives us of calling the attention of our readers to the deep, eloquent and masterly paper which stands first in our present number.' And such was the demand for more, that De Quincey in the December issue promised a third part, 'drawn up with much assistance from fuller memoranda, and the recollections of my only companion during those years' — namely, his wife — 'as I shall be able to command on my return to the north,' a third part to be ready about the last of January 1822. This promise which he never fulfilled, was made in a letter to *The London Magazine* in reply to doubts expressed in the *Sheffield Iris* by James Montgomery as to the veracity of the *Confessions*.

## II

PERHAPS it is hardly necessary at this late date to defend the veracity of the *Confessions*. Such little evidence as there is by which to test the narrative confirms its essential truth; on the other hand there is nothing to disprove. The most that can be said against it is that the experiences recorded are heightened and elaborated. That the *Confessions* are not strictly true to fact, we may well admit; but it seems hard to doubt that it is in all essentials based upon, and true to, actuality.

'The entire *Confessions*,' says De Quincey in his own defence, 'were designed to convey a narrative of my own experience as an Opium-eater, drawn up with entire simplicity and fidelity to the facts; from which they can in no respect have deviated, except by such trifling inaccuracies of date, etc., as the memoranda I have with me in London would not, in all cases, enable me to reduce to certainty. Over and above the want of these memoranda, I laboured sometimes (as I will acknowledge) under another, and a graver embarrassment: — To tell nothing *but* the truth must, in all cases, be an unconditional moral law; <sup>2</sup> to tell the *whole* truth is not equally

<sup>2</sup> He reiterates this thirty years later in the general preface to his collected works, *Selections Grave and Gay*, 'Autobiographic Sketches,' p. xii.

so: in the earlier narrative, I acknowledge I could not always do this: regards of delicacy towards some who are yet living, and of just tenderness to the memory of others who are dead, obliged me, at various points in my narrative, to suppress what would have added interest to the story, and sometimes, perhaps, have left impressions on the reader favourable to other purposes of an autobiographer. In cases which touch too closely upon their own rights and interests, all men should hesitate to trust their own judgment: thus far I imposed a restraint upon myself, as all just and conscientious men would do: in everything else I spoke fearlessly, and as if writing private memoirs for my own dearest friends. Events, indeed, in my life, connected with so many remembrances of grief, and sometimes of self-reproach, had become too sacred from habitual contemplation to be altered or distorted for the unworthy purposes of scenical effect and display, without violating those feelings of self-respect which all men should cherish, and giving a lasting wound to my conscience.' <sup>a</sup>

### III

DURING the next three years — although the *Appendix to the Confessions* was his only product in 1822 — De Quincey published some twenty-two miscellaneous papers in *The London Magazine* drawn from a studious and thoughtful, if fragmentary, past. They were on German literature and philosophy, political economy, education, history, free-masonry; there were reminiscences and translated fiction. Thus his earliest ventures into periodical writing covered the entire range of all his later work. As in his later writings, his interests were discursive and casual; but his papers showed his habitual close logic and subtle casuistry, his exact and elaborate language, his expatiation in development.

<sup>a</sup> *Works*, III, 464. This is supported by a passage in the *Conversations with Woodhouse* (Garnett, p. 214): — "There are," said he, "certain places and events and circumstances which have been mixed up or connected with parts of my life which have been very unfortunate, and these, from constant meditation and reflection upon them, have obtained with me a sort of sacredness, and become associated with solemn feelings, so that I cannot bear without the greatest mental agony to advert to the subject, or hear it adverted to by others in any tone of levity or witticism." He was speaking of a remark of Lamb's 'in a jeering, but good humoured way about Oxford Street.'

He began as a great stylist and was at once recognized as such.<sup>4</sup>

His articles were of extreme variety as to quality and interest. There were few which sprang from inner necessity or from sheer enthusiasm for the subject. He tells his public that he was writing not for *credit* (i.e. fame) but against creditors. His first venture with the *Confessions* had given him a literary position in the eyes of his editors so that he was able to offer them anything from his pen which he might have on hand, or which he could throw together with the least possible trouble to himself. He was sadly in debt; he was far from well; he had no literary ambition beyond that of earning money. He had not yet faced the fact that he was to become a professional writer for periodicals. He was, therefore, during these three years, a literary 'casual'; and his output shows it. Only now and then, by accident, as it were, did he produce a paper of lasting worth.

There were more than a dozen articles from the German; direct translations or adaptations; among them five fantastic tales. There was the critique of Carlyle's version of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, prejudiced, playfully malicious, lively, in which Carlyle did not escape scatheless. There were articles on education, *The Letters to a Young Man*, for example. There were economic papers, most notable being *The Dialogue of Three Templers*, expounding the doctrines of Ricardo. And there was a group of papers — *Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater* — a veritable scrap-book of paragraphs and small essays upon things in general. Among these appeared the admirable *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> All these early articles were anonymous or pseudonymous. Now and then he signed himself 'X.Y.Z.' (e.g. Letter in December 1821); he signed himself 'Grasmeriensis Teutonizans' (article on Richter in the same number). Does this mean that he shunned publicity since he had no intention of becoming a professional magazine writer?

<sup>5</sup> During 1821 De Quincey planned many things, even though they were never realized. He was about to write notes on an economic pamphlet by Taylor; an introduction to some hexameters which he had himself composed. (Perhaps these were the verse translation of the first book of Voss's *Luise*, the MS. of which is in the possession of Worcester College.) He was about to write on the mode of reading Latin; on Kant's philosophy; on Coleridge's literary character. He was preparing to translate from the German some mate-

## IV

IN the little paper *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*, De Quincey shows for the first time his critical powers. It is famous, deservedly famous; and it has in Shakespearean criticism established once and for all the artistic validity of that startling change of key following the murder of Duncan. De Quincey had long been fascinated by the knocking, in spite of his inability to justify his feeling according to regular formulæ; then, by analysis and subtlety of generalization, he offered an explanation of its effectiveness based upon psychology. Penetrating and philosophic, he produced conclusions as significant as anything in Coleridge or Hazlitt. This paper was a brilliant beginning and might well have been considered as a first step towards a distinguished critical career.

But straight literary criticism seems not to have interested De Quincey deeply. He recognized that it involved psychological problems of the deepest sort; he constantly reiterates his concern with psychology. He could hardly have associated with Coleridge as he did without having discussed the psychological relationships of criticism. Yet, curiously, he never paid much attention to Coleridge's critical writings or ideas, much as he admired his conversation and poetry. Whenever he was writing of the works of the men of letters whom he personally knew, he was constantly wandering off into biographic anecdote; and whenever he was dealing with the great literature of the past, he was most often diverted by biographical or historical fact.

He had a fondness for abstract definitions and principles, and discussed them in splendid passages. Thus, for example, in that somewhat straggling series of papers *Letters to a*

rial on weather observations and meteorological tables. He proposed a book of 'free translations of Horace's odes, to be undertaken, not the whole by any one person, but each person to do an ode, into the spirit of which he felt himself to enter — the whole to be done *con amore*, and at leisure — or whenever a sense of the beauty of any ode is strong on the mind, and the party feels called to transfuse its spirit into English. . . . He has himself a few odes, which he has striven to render, when under the influence of these feelings — and he may possibly add to their number.' He declared that he had laid a proposal before Murray of a volume undescribed. (*Conversations with Woodhouse*, BS. MSS. Passage omitted by Garnett.)

*Young Man*, he makes the well-known contrast between 'literature of knowledge' and 'literature of power,' more fully elaborated in his later essays on *Style* and *On the Poetry of Pope*, a distinction which he acknowledges to have been originally suggested to him by Wordsworth. But, in his characteristic way, these definitions are too often casual and unsystematic. Furthermore, he is likely to reveal in them his tendency towards a certain perverse originality. His subtlety, his self-confidence, often drove him to an attempted precision which results in confusion; as, for instance, in his essay on *Rhetoric* where he seeks to overturn the more usual meaning of the word 'rhetoric' and substitute his own, namely, rhetoric is the mere adornment of style, the playing with ideas for the pure joy of it. Yet unsatisfying as such passages are, they are often suggestive. As is usual with De Quincey, the value of his prose, apart from its splendour, lies rather in the ideas thrown off by the way than in the main argument; in a revealing figure, a comparison, or an unforgettable illuminating phrase.

Now and then only does he settle down to the specific and systematic. This he does in his short and concise article, *The Principles of Greek Tragedy*. Here in a moment of keen intellectual clarity, he analyses closely the reasons which give Greek tragedy its peculiar grandeur and repose, its monumental character, its avoidance of action, its use of the typical rather than the individual. He brings to bear upon the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles in orderly fashion all his knowledge of historical background and conditions of presentation; so that his discussion is enlightening. In this paper, De Quincey is objective in a high degree, relatively unprejudiced against classical poetry because of its failure to attain that sublimity which he finds only in Christian literature, pre-eminently in Milton. Here the Greek dramatists are estimated by their own standards. But more characteristic of De Quincey is his harsh judgment, elsewhere given, upon Homer, because Homer fails to attain Miltonic grandeur.

Literature was for De Quincey, in full measure, an art of communication; the communication of power, of emotions, of the 'higher or transcendent truth of human nature.' It

was for him a profoundly important thing and important in proportion as it strikes deep or high. This one feels throughout his works, an impression supported by innumerable quotations cited and dwelt upon with exquisite tact and discrimination. But his taste was romantic, and his uncatholic and almost provincial appreciation had a strong romantic foundation.

Even within his romantic prepossessions, De Quincey might have done substantive service to criticism, had he applied his full powers to the English poets and the problems presented by their practice. But he never rose to his opportunities. Perhaps he came nearest to doing so in his essay *On Wordsworth's Poetry*, written in 1845. But even in this he is again casual, beginning by criticising adversely on psychologic grounds the story of Margaret at the opening of *The Excursion* and ending by the enumeration and illustration of some of Wordsworth's great contributions to English poetry through his close observation, happy phrasing, and penetrative imagination. Then, in a postscript, De Quincey lightly touches upon Wordsworth's inadequate theory of poetic language. That is all. Of other contemporaries he says little; Byron, he ignores; Keats he admires for *Hyperion*; Shelley he recognizes as worthy of consideration, although De Quincey seems to have known little of his work beyond *Laon and Cythna*; Landor he praises with qualifications. Of Tennyson and Browning he seems never to have heard.

It is impossible to believe that a man of De Quincey's type of mind did not have a body of critical principles carefully thought out. But he never gave it to the world; and one can only deduce it from his writings at large. His method of applying his private doctrines was to expound or to judge. It was thus that he could make such sweeping generalizations as to classic and French literatures. He belongs with the dogmatists of the eighteenth century rather than with the philosophical, interpretative, or historical critics of the nineteenth. His standards of criticism were not those of Addison or Johnson, for they were his own and personal; but he used his principles with all their vigour and ruthlessness. In his better moments, he turned to the analytic and concrete, as I have

pointed out; and in such passages as that in which he examines Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* or the *Satires* he is admirable. Yet he has left us so little of this sort that he has not established himself among the important literary critics.

His gifts and taste would seem to have prepared him to be a distinguished critic and a delver into the mysteries underlying literary art. Why did he miss his high calling? It is hard to say. In one place, as if in apology, he suggests that in his harried life he had not had the leisure requisite for solid critical work. 'Criticism,' he says, 'if it is to be conscientious and profound, and if it is applied to an object so unlimited as poetry, must be almost as unattainable by any hasty effort as fine poetry itself.'<sup>6</sup> And, again, a few sentences further on, he suggests that the times are not ripe for great criticism. 'In the sense of absolute and philosophical criticism, we have little or none; for before *that* can exist, we must have a good psychology, whereas, at present, we have none at all.' But neither of these passages is a completely satisfying answer to our question. The real reason seems to be that De Quincey lacked vital interest in literary criticism for its own sake; and, unlike Coleridge, he failed to persist strenuously in philosophical reflection upon it.<sup>7</sup>

# V

THE London visit of 1821 and the connexion with *The London Magazine* carried De Quincey at once into the literary set. He renewed his acquaintance with the Lambs. 'Not until 1821 and again in 1823,' he wrote, 'did I come to know Charles Lamb thoroughly.' De Quincey living at 4 York Street was a near neighbour to the Lambs who, knowing his general temperament and health, 'did not ask me to their parties, unless when they happened to be small ones; but, as often as they were free of engagements themselves, they would take no denial — come I must, to dine with them and stay as late as I would.' At their house it is presumable that he met some of their friends. But it was at the monthly dinners given by Taylor and Hessey to the contributors to their maga-

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, XI, 294.

<sup>7</sup> I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*, p. 5.

zine that he extended his acquaintance most widely. At these, besides the men whom he already knew, he met Hamilton, Reynolds, the strange and unhappy Wainwright, Allan Cunningham, Montague, Rice; and, for us most fortunately of all, Richard Woodhouse, the friend of Keats, who was fascinated by De Quincey and kept during the autumn months of 1821 a notebook in which he jotted down with great fullness his conversations, as Woodhouse heard them at Taylor's, or on the streets as De Quincey and Woodhouse returned to their lodgings, or in Woodhouse's own chambers. Woodhouse was an intellectual young man who recognized genius when he saw it; and with a tenacious memory and a keen sense of the essential in talk, he acted for a brief time as an invaluable Boswell.<sup>8</sup> From these notes we can gather information, unavailable elsewhere, as to De Quincey's appearance, talk and mind at this period of his life.

Woodhouse first met De Quincey at Taylor and Hessey's on Wednesday, 28 October 1821, again on Thursday, October 29, and frequently afterwards; and he maintained the record of his meetings with the Opium Eater until he actually helped him into the coach for the Lake country, on December 29.<sup>9</sup>

'I had formed to myself,' wrote Woodhouse in describing his first meeting with De Quincey, 'the idea of a tall, thin, pale, gentlemanly-looking, courtier-like man; but I met a short, sallow-looking person, of a very peculiar cast of countenance, and apparently much an invalid. His demeanour was very gentle, modest, and unassuming; '— we must remember that he was at the moment the most talked-of man among the contributors to *The London Magazine* because of the sensational effect of the *Confessions* — 'and his conversation fully came up to the idea I had formed of what would be that of the writer of those articles.' And Woodhouse went on to enumerate those of whom he talked, Wordsworth, Southey, Wilson and the other Edinburgh men, Scott, Lockhart and the

<sup>8</sup> This notebook is preserved in MS. in the possession of the Misses Baird-smith. Part of it was printed by Garnett in his edition of the *Confessions* (1885); but it contains important matter not printed by Garnett.

<sup>9</sup> De Quincey only once or twice in his letters mentions Woodhouse, so that one may infer that there was hardly friendship between them.



'Blackwood writers.' De Quincey was autobiographic in his conversation, telling of his school-days at Bath Grammar School, at Mr. Spencer's at Winkfield; <sup>10</sup> recounting his physical sufferings, in line with the *Confessions*, and adding details and memories not included in the famous papers. Then Woodhouse estimated, and commented upon, the conversation and the character of the Opium Eater:

'The Opium-Eater appears to have read a great deal, and to have thought much more. I was astonished at the depth and *reality*, as I may so call it, of his knowledge. He seems to have passed nothing that occurred in the course of his study unreflected on or unremembered. His conversation appeared like the elaboration of a mine of results; and if at any time a general observation of his became matter of question or ulterior disquisition it was found that he had ready his reasons at a moment's notice; so that it was clear that his opinions were the fruits of his own reflections on what had come before him, and had not been taken up from others. Indeed, this last clearly appeared, since upon most of the topics that arose he was able to give a very satisfactory account, not merely of *what books* had been written upon those subjects, but of *what opinions* had been entertained upon them, together with his own judgments of those opinions, his acquiescence in them, or qualifications of them. Upon almost every subject that was introduced he had not only that general information which is easily picked up in literary society or from books, but that minute and accurate acquaintance with the details that can be acquired only from personal investigation of a subject and reflection upon it at the same time. Taylor led him into political economy, into the Greek and Latin accents, into antiquities, Roman roads, old castles, the origin and analogy of languages; upon all these he was informed to considerable minuteness. The same with regard to Shakespeare's sonnets, Spenser's minor poems, and the great writers and characters of Elizabeth's age and those of Cromwell's time. His judgments of books, of writers, of politics, were particularly satisfactory and sound.' <sup>11</sup>

Further meetings only confirmed Woodhouse's impressions.

'On the subject of reading poetry, he observed that Wilson's character of countenance is generally very lively, but this leaves

<sup>10</sup> Woodhouse shows his fallibility; for he records that it was from Spencer's that De Quincey made the famous elopement of the *Confessions*, an error, natural enough, in remembering conversation. (Garnett, p. 194.)

<sup>11</sup> Garnett, pp. 194 ff.

him the moment he begins to read poetry; his face then assumes a conventicle appearance, and his voice a methodistical drawl that is quite distressing. Southey mouths it out like a wolf howling. Coleridge lengthens the vowels and reads so monotonously, slowly, and abstractedly, that you can scarce make out what he says, and you lose the rhythm. Wordsworth sometimes reads very well.

'It seems to me, from the manner in which the Opium-Eater recited a few lines occasionally which he had occasion to quote, that the reading upon which in his *Confessions* he piques himself would scarcely appear good to most people. He reads with too inward a voice; he dwells much upon the long vowels (this he does in his conversation, which makes it resemble more a speech delivered in a debating society than the varitonous discourse usually held among friends); he ekes out particular syllables, has generally much appearance of intensity, and, in short, removes his tone and manner rather too much from the mode of common language. Hence I could not always catch the words in his quotations, and though one acquainted with the quotation beforehand would relish it the more from having an opportunity afforded of dwelling upon it, and from hearing the most made of those particular parts for the sake of which it is brought forward, yet general hearers would be left far behind, and in a state of wonder at the quoter.'<sup>12</sup>

## VI

THERE are some strange things which appear in the *Conversations* as recorded by Woodhouse. One of the most notable is the attitude of hostility, of suspicion towards John Wilson. Their friendship had begun in 1809. They had constantly corresponded and met almost as brothers. 'He was the only male friend I ever had,' De Quincey once wrote. But here in the *Conversations*, in an atmosphere and company not inclined to look with favour upon anyone connected with *Blackwood's Magazine*, De Quincey not only reflected the London hostility, but gave loose to his own bitter feelings. There can be no chance of Woodhouse's misinterpreting his remarks; they were too many and too persistent. No, there was a secret enmity at De Quincey's heart for the time,<sup>13</sup> whatever the cause.

<sup>12</sup> Garnett, p. 198.

<sup>13</sup> The passages quoted from Woodhouse in this section are from the BS. MS. and were not printed by Garnett.

On September 20 Woodhouse begins his notes by quoting at second-hand through Hessey:

'Wilson . . . was the writer of the most objectionable of the articles in that Magazine [i.e. *Blackwood's*] of a personal nature. He was the inditer of the attack upon his friend Coleridge. And at the very time, he was abusing and vilifying him anonymously, he wrote in his own name to the Opium Eater, pointing out these articles to his notice, reprobating them and urging the O. E. repeatedly to write in defence of his "friend Coleridge." The "deep damnation" of such conduct must sooner or later be trumpeted forth to the world. . . . He was the author of the attacks upon Keats. His character is represented to be a compound of cruelty and meanness. He will domineer over those authors who as yet have no reputation in the world, he will grudge them their fair degree of credit, he will abuse them, and strive to keep them back, and even to crush them. But to those who are established in reputation, and above his power to injure, he will be abject and cringing. His character is fully appreciated in Edinburgh. He would be scouted there and sent to Coventry, but for his connection with Lockhart who married Walter Scott's daughter, for those who should scout Wilson, must also scout Lockhart, and this would offend Sir Walter, whose Influence, Interest and Character the Scotch are too *prudent* not properly to value; and thus the "par nobile fratum," as was well observed, come off *Scott-free*.'

On October 28 and 29, the records of the conversation at which Woodhouse was himself present contain another passage about Wilson. After some remarks in regard to the part played by Lockhart and Wilson in the quarrel which culminated in the death of John Scott — a quarrel of which De Quincey said that 'all the most objectionable articles were Wilson's,' Woodhouse continued:

'The O.E. described Wilson as an acquaintance of his of long standing, and said that he would have been the best and kindest creature breathing, but for his being a literary man and a poet. He was originally possessed of much feeling and enthusiasm — he published some earlier works under the impression of such sentiments — and it was the reception these works met with that completely turned his soul. He was laughed at, ridiculed and mocked for these productions. "Nothing," (said O.E.) "causes a greater rankling in the heart, than to find that you have laid open its finer feelings and have got laughed at for your pains — the revulsion is dreadful. In the same manner we

can never be thoroughly reconciled to a man to whom we have been too communicative and confidential and who has betrayed us." Wilson became jealous of every one who has trod in the same path as himself, and vindictive towards the world — he strove to attack and pull down the reputation of all other poets whom he thought he cd. safely assail — while on the contrary, he was submissive and crouching to all whom the world had marked with its approbation, or whom he thought it was beyond his power to lower. He changed his enthusiasm for hypocrisy — and (says O.E.) "accordingly all his serious writings are extravagant and overdone; and they give the reader a sense of exaggeration, and a feeling that the author is insincere and has himself a misgiving about what he says." In short he has lost his principle. Then he never has any originality: tho' he has a strange power of picking up and appropriating to himself and making the most of what he gleans elsewhere.'

Early in November Wilson was in London, and from the *Conversations* we learn that Wilson was himself eager to contribute to *The London Magazine*. He seems to have consulted De Quincey about the possibility, and proposed some subjects which De Quincey thought would not be acceptable. He called at least once upon Taylor and Hessey in regard to the matter, but apparently without success. But De Quincey felt that he had less honest reasons in his visits. 'Wilson (O. E. has no doubt) came up to Town principally to learn particulars of the editorship and management of, and the writers for, the London Magazine: and he feels sure that in a very short time there will be an attack upon it. Wilson has made many attempts to learn incidentally particulars — by talking a good deal on the subject, and by leading industriously the conversation that way. He has also expressed to O. E. his great dislike of Lamb and Hazlitt — which O. E. construes into a sort of beforehand apology to himself for attacking a magazine with which he is connected, and an intimation that he is not to take offence.'

Yet at this very juncture we have a letter of De Quincey to Hessey, asking leave to postpone a visit to Hessey until the next day, namely November 2, in order that he may have dinner with Wilson. In this he says: — 'Just after you had gone out, in came Wilson: he goes on Monday to Edinburgh: on Monday at the *latest*: and, as he dines out to-morrow and

Sunday (indeed he stays only for the purpose of dining out) — I find that, unless I can accept his invitation to-night, I cannot see him again. On many accounts this would be very inconvenient to me; and also, from old remembrances, I should be sorry to refuse an invitation on which he had laid so much stress — when it might be the last time I shall ever be in the way of accepting from him.' <sup>14</sup> There is no hint here of ill feeling, unless it is somehow hidden in the last, dark clause.

But again, just a month later, on December 2, comes another passage in the *Conversations* even more startling. That evening De Quincey was seized with a cramp in the stomach, and had to leave the dinner-party early. But to Taylor, who saw him home, he talked; and the summary of the conversation was handed on to Woodhouse to record.

'In the course of their walk, [De Quincey] observed to T. that he had a sort of feeling, or omen of anticipation, that possibly there was some being in the world who was fated to do him at some time a great and irreparable injury — and this thought often weighed upon him. He was not superstitious, but he could not get rid of this impression. Many circumstances seemed to make it not improbable that Wilson might be that man. He knew him to be jealous of a rival in any pursuit he undertook, and sufficiently vindictive and malicious to exert himself to ruin any one under such circumstances. A particular fact (mentioned by O. E. to Taylor, Reynolds and myself) showed that he was capable of this. He said once to the O. E. "You are never likely to be anything of a poet, indeed you cannot; and I should advise you not to attempt it. But you are a good metaphysician. Pursue your metaphysics. I shall never study them, and we are not likely to clash."

'He has however in consequence of his office' — that of Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh — 'since turned his attention this way: — He has often wished O. E. to enter into those subjects, and to open and discuss his theories; but this the latter has in a great degree declined. He has however in their conversations together mentioned some of them, and he thinks it not impossible that if he himself ever publishes his discoveries or opinions in that science they may be found to be the same with some which may perhaps have already been set forth by Wilson as his own — "here, said O. E., I feel that we may cross each other: We have already in one sense done so in respect of the two magazines. These things

<sup>14</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. Add. 37,215; Friday, 2 November 1821.

Wilson can never forgive: they will rankle in his mind: and at some time or other I am sure that he will do what he can to injure me. I care not for myself, but there are quarters through which he can wound me."'

Wilson had tried to secure De Quincey's help in writing some lectures on philosophical topics for use in his first course at Edinburgh, in August 1820. There is obviously much truth in De Quincey's criticisms of Wilson's lack of settled literary principles, and of his willingness to make unexpected and not too nice attacks upon authors. But the vindictiveness of De Quincey's attitude throughout these conversations in the autumn of 1821, and the confession of fear lest Wilson should injure him seem to point to a state of mind in De Quincey approaching paranoia as far as Wilson was concerned; a cloud still lingering from the irritability of 1818-9.<sup>15</sup>

## VII

DURING seven months — from June to the end of December — De Quincey stayed on in London; but in spite of the great success of the *Confessions* which might well have spurred him on to writing, he produced nothing more of importance. The reasons are not far to seek. They lay hidden in physical disability, which in turn was conditioned by desperate poverty and threatening debts — and by opium.

As all too often, we know a good deal about his financial position. His expenses at home were heavy. His family had increased. By this time he had three children — William, Margaret, and Horatio. In the previous spring, still holding the lease of the cottage at Town End, he had removed his household to Fox Ghyll, Loughrigg, considerably nearer Ambleside, not far from Rydal on the western side of the valley, a house charmingly fitted into a great fold of the fells rising steep about it; a cottage later occupied by W. E. Forster, the brother-in-law of Matthew Arnold. He had literally been driven out of Dove Cottage by 'books and babies'; but it meant double rent. And in addition, he seems to have hired just before this a third cottage, or part of a cottage, for his

<sup>15</sup> On Wilson's side, one should mention the introduction of De Quincey into *Noctes Ambrosianae* in *Blackwood's*, October 1823 — a gesture entirely flattering, if not too skilful.

overflow of books.<sup>16</sup> Thus he had three rents to meet! Then there were debts; and the debts were crying to be paid. But instead of enabling him to reduce them, his London earnings, slender as they were, were 'absorbed by a new London debt created in the very act of extinguishing the old Westmorland debt. . . I found myself tied to a stake to be baited by my creditors.'

He was in a desperate state, as one incident clearly shows. In late July or early August he was driven to write to Coleridge asking that the £300 which De Quincey had given to him in 1807, and which Coleridge at the time had accepted only as a provisional loan, should be returned. De Quincey could have brought himself to make such a request only under the most harrowing necessity; and the imagination in trying to reconstruct the incident can picture only humiliation and pathos. The letter of request is lost; but Coleridge's reply is preserved, a reply full of cringing apology at his inability which completes a peculiarly painful episode.<sup>17</sup>

De Quincey could not write enough even to enable him to leave London for home, as he longed to do. And ultimately, it was only because Taylor and Hessey accepted his offer to write for them a novel — name unknown, and apparently, never finished — and on the strength of his promise advanced £157, 10, 0, that he was able to return to Fox Ghyll at the close of the year.<sup>18</sup> But he went in a sort of despair. 'The effect of having taken opium so long,' Woodhouse reported on 9 November, 'is that these things [his troubles] hang upon my spirits and unfit me for struggling through difficulties. — I feel confident that if I had been a single man and had only myself to care for, I should have died under my difficulties; but the thought of my wife and children who have a sort of *conscientious* claim upon me to live and exert myself, made me strive with my troubles and saved me.'<sup>19</sup>

At the very end of 1821, then, De Quincey was back at Fox

<sup>16</sup> In 1824 in a letter to Hessey he speaks of removing books and papers from a cottage where they had been deposited for the preceding three and one half years. (Hughes MSS.)

<sup>17</sup> E. L. Griggs, *Unpublished Correspondence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, II, 293; 9 August 1821.

<sup>18</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. Letter to Hessey, n.d. fo. 11–12.

<sup>19</sup> Woodhouse, BS. MSS.

Ghyll; but his health and his debts continued to torment him. There were two pressing debts heavy upon him; one long in arrears and another due to his father-in-law and unexpectedly demanded in payment; altogether, totaling a sum of £560. His London excursion had been disappointing financially, whatever glory he had won. He now tried to sell his library, 'as a desperate remedy for a desperate case, . . . or that part of it which could be supposed saleable.'<sup>20</sup> But the scheme failed to bring in any appreciable sum. Fortunately, however, through allowances of his mother and uncle he found himself by the end of the year able to reduce his indebtedness to a bare £100. But his happy condition was only temporary, for he declared that as soon as the new year, 1823, should come, he should be 'more furiously persecuted for this sum of £100 than ever he had been when his debts were heaviest.'

## VIII

BUT the year 1822 with its almost complete lack of literary production — the *Sequel* to the *Confessions* was all he published — was most notable for the struggle against opium which he has recorded at tedious length. He was profoundly interested in his own case and saw fit to take the public once more into his confidence.

In August 1822, when the *Confessions* were first published in book form, De Quincey added an appendix in lieu, as it were, of the unwritten third part which he had promised in the previous December. 'Those who have read the *Confessions*,' he wrote, 'will have closed them with the impression that I had wholly renounced the use of Opium. This impression I meant to convey,<sup>21</sup> and that for two reasons: first, because the very act of deliberately recording such a state of suffering necessarily presumes in the recorder a power of surveying his own case as a cool spectator . . . ; secondly, because I, who had descended from so large a quantity as 8,000 drops to so small a one, (comparatively speaking) as a quantity ranging between 300 and 160 drops, might well suppose that

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Hessey, Brit. Mus. MSS.

<sup>21</sup> This impression he endeavoured to prolong in signing certain sketches published in 1823, a year later, as by 'a late Opium-eater.'



the victory was in effect achieved.' <sup>22</sup> He went on, 'In no long time after the paper was written, I became sensible that the effort which remained would cost me far more energy than I had anticipated; and the necessity for making it was more apparent every month.' He was here speaking of the months after September 1821. 'In particular, I became aware of an increasing callousness or defect of sensibility in the stomach.' He became afraid of a 'scirrhus state of that organ.' 'Opium, therefore, I resolved wholly to abjure, as soon as I should find myself at liberty to bend my undivided attention and energy to this purpose' — a period which did not arrive until June 1822. <sup>23</sup>

'I am wretchedly ill,' he had written Hessey on April 20 1822, 'but so far likely to be better, that whereas, through all the winter in addit. to far worse ailments, I have been so possessed by rheumatism as never to be free from it for 36 hours, so that I could not attempt even to walk — being generally unable to stand up-right or to rise without help, — now at length I am beginning to get out for daily exercise of 15 miles a day.' <sup>24</sup> Yet the need, the imperative need, of reducing his opium still haunted him; for on June 24 he began the experiment with all the scientific accuracy of observation and regulation of which he was capable, keeping the most careful notes as to the effects of the reduction from day to day, almost from hour to hour.

'On that day (June 24),' he records in the Appendix, 'I began my experiment, having previously settled in my own mind that I would not flinch, but would "stand up to the scratch"'

<sup>22</sup> *Works*, III, 467.

<sup>23</sup> Woodhouse confirms this general statement as to the autumn of 1821. 'He is now thirty-six years of age. His constitution is much shattered. He has reduced his daily potion of laudanum from 8000 to about 80 drops' — an even greater reduction than is claimed in the Appendix — 'but he occasionally takes more, and whenever he is obliged to do this for any length of time the consequence is a great irritation in his stomach — he feels there an itching which he is obliged to bear, and unable by any means to allay. This is accompanied by a tendency in his stomach to turn everything to acid, and no alkaline medicine has any effect upon this. The only medicine that reaches the disorder is that prescribed by the surgeon he alluded to in his *Confessions*. He says this sensation of itching is so dreadful that if it were to last much longer than it usually does (about eight or ten hours) it would drive him out of his mind.' (Garnett, p. 194.)

<sup>24</sup> *Brit. Mus. MSS.*

under any possible "punishment." I must premise that about 170 or 180 drops had been my ordinary allowance for many months. Occasionally I had run up as high as 500, and once nearly to 700. In repeated preludes to my final experiment I had also gone as low as 100 drops, but had found it impossible to stand it beyond the fourth day, — which, by the way, I have always found more difficult to get over than any of the preceding three. I went off under easy sail — 130 drops each day for three days: in the fourth I plunged at once to 80. The misery which I now suffered "took the conceit" out of me at once; and for about a month I continued off and on about this mark: then I sunk to 60, and the next day to — none at all. This was the first day for nearly ten years that I had existed without opium. I persevered in my abstinence for ninety hours;<sup>25</sup> that is upwards of half a week. Then I took — ask me not how much: say, ye severest; what would ye have done? Then I abstained again: then took about 25 drops; then abstained; and so on.

'Meantime the symptoms which attended my case for the first six weeks of the experiment were these: enormous irritability and excitement of the whole system; the stomach, in particular, restored to a full feeling of vitality and sensibility, but often in great pain; unceasing restlessness night and day: sleep — I scarcely knew what it was: three hours out of the twenty-four was the utmost I had, and that so agitated and shallow that I heard every sound that was near me: lower jaw constantly swelling: mouth ulcerated: and many other distressing symptoms that would be tedious to repeat; amongst which, however, I must mention one, because it had never failed to accompany any attempt to renounce opium, — viz. violent sternutation. This now became exceedingly troublesome; sometimes lasting for two hours at once, and recurring at least twice or three times a day. I was not much surprised at this, on recollecting what I had somewhere heard or read that the membrane which lines the nostrils is a prolongation of that which lines the stomach; whence, I believe, are explained the inflammatory appearances about the nostrils of dram-drinkers. The sudden restoration of its original sensibility to the stomach expressed itself, I suppose, in this way. It is remarkable also

<sup>25</sup> 'About the 34th day I think, I had actually accomplished the end — for 90 hours (i.e. more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  week) I had done without a drop: suffered much: having demonstrated the profit, I allowed myself a little: then again abstained: again indulged: and so on: Settling down (from 150–200 drops — my ordinary dose) to about 40 as a maximum for comfort: though without losing my station, I sometimes ran up the ladder far higher for a day.' To J. A. Hesse, Tuesday night, Sept. 1822. This letter was printed in part by Hogg, p. 213; but a copy of the original has been kindly sent me by its present owner, Dr. J. Morris Slemons, of Los Angeles.

that, during the whole period of years through which I had taken opium, I had never once caught cold (as the phrase is), not even the slightest cough. But now a violent cold attacked me, and a cough soon after.

'In an unfinished fragment of a letter begun about this time to —, I find these words: "You ask me to write the —. Do you know Beaumont and Fletcher's play of Thierry and Theodoret? There you will see my case as to sleep; nor is it much of an exaggeration in other features. I protest to you that I have a greater influx of thoughts in one hour at present than in a whole year under the reign of opium. It seems as if all the thoughts which had been frozen up for a decade of years by opium had now, according to the old fable, been thawed at once, such a multitude stream in upon me from all quarters. Yet such is my impatience and hideous irritability that, for one that I detain and write down, fifty escape me. In spite of my suffering and want of sleep, I cannot stand still or sit for two minutes together. *I nunc, et versus tecum meditare canoros.*"

'At this stage of my experiment I sent to a neighboring surgeon, requesting that he would come over to see me. In the evening he came; and, after briefly stating the case to him, I asked this question: Whether he did not think that the opium might have acted as a stimulus to the digestive organs, and that the present state of suffering in the stomach, which manifestly was the cause of the inability to sleep, might arise from indigestion? His answer was, — No: on the contrary, he thought that the suffering was caused by digestion itself, — which would naturally go on below the consciousness, but which, from the unnatural state of the stomach, vitiated by so long a use of opium, was become distinctly perceptible. . . . By the advice of the surgeon, I tried *bitters*. For a short time these greatly mitigated the feelings under which I laboured; but about the forty-second day of the experiment the symptoms already noticed began to retire, and new ones to arise of a different and far more tormenting class: under these, with a few intervals of remission, I have since continued to suffer.' He was writing in August. He refrained from describing these; but he indicated that they were excessive perspiration and what he called internal rheumatism;<sup>26</sup> and in a letter to Hessey in September he added: 'But all [were] trifles compared with the unspeakable overwhelming unutterable misery of mind which came on in a couple of days and has continued almost unabatingly ever since [i.e. for more than a month]. Though suffering pain, I was in higher spirits on the 40th day than for many years back: some sudden involution in my bodily condition at which I can

hardly guess, has brought me into a state in which at times I feel the wretchedness of a lunatic. Nothing can expound or measure the enormous suffering which I have endured since then. I do not mean bodily pains: those and far greater I bear cheerfully; nor do I mean wretchedness from mental causes. — On the contrary, all external circumstances being the same as since on Friday night the 40th day I was at the summit of a continuous and rapid ascent in good spirits from the week I began the experiment. But what I mean is — gloom of mind from some unknown bodily cause. I groan when I think of it.' At the moment he was keeping to about 25 drops a day.

## CHAPTER XV

### FAREWELL TO LONDON

1823-1825

#### I

**B**Y THE end of 1822, still menaced by debts, De Quincey once more turned to London as the only way out of his difficulties. He left Westmorland on December 9; <sup>1</sup> and soon after his arrival, finding it difficult to tell Hessey by word of mouth his actual situation and needs, he wrote him a very long letter of explanation.

He was in London, he said, prepared to write an essay a week, so that in less than a month he would be able to get ahead of his debts. Yet he had not succeeded in carrying out his plans; he was only falling deeper into financial distress; and he had not even money enough to go back to Westmorland, for which he longed. Then with passion, he went on: —

*'Why am I now in London? For what purpose (not as easily accomplished at home); — on what justification; — for whose interest real or imagined? Are you aware — 1. of the enormous sacrifice which I am making in personal happiness by staying at a distance of 300 miles from my own family in London? 2. are you aware of the price in money at which I am doing this? 3. Have you ever asked — whose interests this residence in London was meant to serve? — Most ruefully I fear upon some indications, that you have not. — True it is, that as to the first question, it might naturally be supposed impossible for any man who had taken the trouble to think of it at all not to be aware of the enormity of sacrifice, but the hurry of a London life has prevented you, I believe, from thinking of it at all: let me then call your attention to it. Simply to renounce all domestic comforts — to exchange a roomy house for a single chamber — a Westmorland valley for a London alley — attendance of servants for the necessity of doing all things for myself — a regular table for no table at all — literary leisure for the necessity of writing all day long — etc. etc. Simply these sacrifices in the estimate of the world, would rank as very heavy, and implying some powerful motive: All this part of the sacrifice however is as nothing, considering what remains: I not only give up the society of my own family — but subject myself to the afflicting knowledge that in the event of any fatal illness in*

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Hessey, Brit. Mus. MSS. Add. 37,215.

my family I am by distance and otherwise so imprisoned that all hope of coming in time is to me at an end. This thought preys like a worm upon my spirits: and I need not say that the profound solitude to which I am condemned gives it its whole force. But such a miserable subject I willingly quit: and I advert to it simply to draw the sharper attention to the irrationality of my staying unless for some known object well understood between us: I mean some service which I can render here — much better than in Westmorland.’<sup>2</sup>

The journey to London had already been a failure and De Quincey was in despair.

Some terms were evidently arrived at, satisfactory or not; and De Quincey stayed on, unwell, unable to sleep, writing, struggling to meet his bills, asking for advances against manuscript handed in to Taylor and Hessey. On 21 March 1823 he was ‘worn out with sleeplessness and taking laudanum three days in succession.’ On March 29 he wrote,

‘I am much worse to-day, and was so all yesterday — especially after Dr. Darling had gone away: by the way, he left me with the remark — “that I had the game in my own hands”: I fear he is mistaken. I now expect, more than ever, to have a severe struggle for life — to say the best. Accordingly it is folly for me to stay in London, where I am spending needlessly every hour on my expensive lodgings.’ He asked the loan of a book on ‘“Disorder of Digestion and the Organic Affections in which they sometimes terminate”. . . . If you cannot borrow it, could you procure it for me at the Trade price? which I ask because, with my debts here, I shall hardly have enough to take me home.’ And then he added: — ‘Do not attribute to me any weak-minded fancies on reading medical books: I have read many: and never fancied myself the nearer to anything I read of. Such fancies are only incident to weak minds — to those who have false preconceptions on Physiology — and to those who fear Death. I shall *grieve* to die, but not *fear* it. I have something really important to tell the world on some very important subjects: and if I had been happier in my pecuniary affairs, I should have told at least part of it before this: but grief of mind for so long a period on account of my fatal embarrassments — and latterly the overwhelming suffering of separation from my wife’s society, as made it impossible for me to write generally or at all except on transient topics or upon fugitive impulse. It is a pity, therefore, to my own private

<sup>2</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. Add. 37,215. The citations from letters to Taylor and Hessey in this chapter are, unless otherwise indicated, all from the same source.

knowledge, that I should die: and a pity, as any body may suppose, on other accounts more peculiar to myself. To stay in London however can hardly benefit so much by the superior medical advice which it affords, as it would injure me by the misery I suffer in being separated from my family.'

On March 29 he was to leave 'to-morrow': on April 10 he lacked money — twelve pounds which he hoped to make up by the fourth *Letter to a Young Man*.

Evidently Taylor and Hessey were generous to him. We hear of sovereigns lent — which his 'Juno of a landlady swallowed at one mouthful' in the spring of 1823, and of a 'present on the *Confessions*' — evidently a voluntary gift on the basis of the profits of the *Confessions* issued in book form in 1822 — an edition in which the author had been given no legal property rights whatever. De Quincey was certainly on good terms with the publishers, for his letters are for the most part begun with 'My dear friend.'<sup>3</sup> After May 21 he wrote of new tasks in hand: — the fifth *Letter to a Young Man*, *The Dice*, and 7. *Taylor* — a paper on Taylor's book on political economy. 'Next week I shall be in Westmorland.' But, not so. On July 24 we have another note: — 'I am now making an effort to labour: which if it is unsuccessful (as it has been for 5 days), I must take some other course: for I am eating out anything I produce by my expenses.' But even more melancholy was the fact that he was evidently hiding from creditors; for the postscript reads: — '“ M. M. in the Swan ” — or simply “ The Gent. in ye. Swan ” is enough by way of direction.' This comes from the last letter in London; for somehow he managed to leave for his beloved Westmorland in August.

There in his house at Fox Ghyll he lived alone with his family; 'shut up as usual — the house always blinded — or left with but one eye to peep out of — he probably in bed — We hear nothing of him;' so Dorothy Wordsworth had written to Quillinan on 19 November 1822, but the description is equally applicable to this following year.<sup>4</sup> The place was remote from neighbours, 'with no soul in the house but

<sup>3</sup> On 9 May 1823, Crabb Robinson lent him £10. I owe this note to Dr. John M. Baker. (Williams Library MSS.)

<sup>4</sup> E. de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 353.

women and children, nor a man to be had, if we were perishing (our nearest neighbours being an old woman and her daughter)'; so De Quincey wrote to Hessey. And there were few comforts; 'We have no means whatever of measuring time except my guess.' And the reason: — 'I have been obliged to sacrifice my wife's watch and other articles of jewellery (which cost £40) for £10; it being now too late to redeem them; a year and nearly two months having elapsed; ' they had been pawned in London in early 1823.<sup>5</sup>

Just before Christmas, 1823, another financial crisis forced De Quincey to contemplate another trip to London. He again wrote to Hessey: — 'This is likely to turn out a prodigious evil to me — an evil beyond all calculation. For this bill's returning being an Ambleside one and from the circumstances attending it — will oblige me to leave the country without delay; whether — or in what direction — I hardly know; for I have not half a crown disposable for travelling; not to mention that, this opium, to which I have necessarily resorted to enable me to bear loss of sleep — exertion — thro' accumulation of care and wretchedness. I am scarcely able to crawl. . . . I will never give another bill as long as I live. During the last 2½ months I have never set my foot out of doors — I have refused to see every soul who called (3 nights ago I was "not at home" to Wordsworth and an old friend whom I had not seen for 5 or 6 years).'<sup>6</sup> In some way or other, the necessity for flight was obviated. He became ill instead. On Christmas day he was unwell; and for 'one good forty days,' from January 2 to February 11 was never out of bed. When he regained his strength he still could not command enough money to get away.

## II

'CHAINED to the stake with no power to escape,' he lingered on at Fox Ghyll, while calamities heaped upon him. Another bill for £10 due to his father-in-law became payable on 21 March 1824. Meantime Hessey, who had become exasperated, changed his whole tone towards him. De Quincey in a

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Hessey, 7 March 1824, formerly owned by a Mr. Hughes.

<sup>6</sup> Letter for sale by Francis Edwards, bookseller of London, 1923.



letter of March 17 referred to the 'intemperate and most unprovoked letter which you wrote to me about a fortnight ago—and the unfeeling and (I must call it) offensive conduct which you have since thought proper to adopt.' Hessey had come down upon him unexpectedly for some arrears of money perhaps for the return of the sum advanced for the unfinished novel of 1821. 'Good God! if you had let me know beforehand that you would detain anything I sent in order to repay yourself . . .' — so De Quincey wrote in a long and frantic letter. Such treatment was not what he had expected, nor had a right to expect. 'I do most energetically contend that my right was clear and indisputable to have the value of the papers sent, or else to have the papers themselves returned to me. This I am sure, is the plain justice of the case under any circumstances; more especially as they do really stand. For these very papers sent to another quarter would have produced me all I wanted [from *Blackwood's* perhaps?]; and, if I forebore on a principle of honour to send them in that direction, it could not be fair that I was to suffer an immeasurable calamity for forbearance. The fact is — that I have all along not only made no overture to others in consideration of the connexion I had with yourself and Mr. Taylor, but have peremptorily rejected all which have been made to me; though in 1822 I had 3 offers made to me which promised to be very favourable, and since I came home in August have had one offer which was all but an offer of *carte blanche* to me: this has been repeated within the last 2 months; and, tho' it is very possible that it might not have turned out so splendid as it appeared, yet at least it would have delivered me *instantly* from all present difficulties, — if in my situation in relation to yourselves, I could have thought it honourable to accept it. All this I mention in no ostentation, as though I had made any unusual sacrifice: on the contrary, I thought it a matter of course, and should never have mentioned it — but in answer to a claim so astonishing and so overwhelming to me as that which you have just acted on.' He was deeply hurt, and referred to Hessey's missive again as 'couched in terms of the most unprovoked ill-temper and violence.'

Further, De Quincey was ill-satisfied with the fact that Hessey is 'in a great mistake as to the compass and pretensions' of the *Dialogues of Three Templars*. 'I design to establish a great aera in Polit. Economy; and, if I am not myself overthrown (which I presume is not likely to happen from such imbecile reasons as any of the Economists — French or English, the Malthuses and the Says) it is clear that it must do so: that, which exposes the rottenness of all other systems, must leave itself standing on their ruins. And, with respect to my share, it is much greater than I have chosen at present to allege: but this will appear as the work advances.' And he enlarged upon the broader implications of the science as he saw them: — 'Now, because you have not yourself studied this science, I believe that you view it chiefly in it's relation to trade — finance — and other useful but vulgar objects of speculation: forgetting it's relations on the other side to logic and the grander aspects of the human intellect.'

## III

FROM as early as 1805 De Quincey had been pondering upon economic problems; after settling down in Grasmere he had been led 'to look into loads of books and pamphlets on many branches of Economy'; and later, in 1818 (or 1819 as he first wrote in the original form of the *Confessions*), in one of his darkest intellectual periods, when wonder and curiosity were emotions that had long been dead, he found that Ricardo's *Political Economy and Taxation* stirred him to an enthusiasm which gave him new life. This re-awakened interest had gained expression in the next year in the unfinished and unpublished *Prologomena to all Possible Systems of Political Economy*; and in 1823 and 1824, in several articles for the *London Magazine*. One of these brought a reply from Hazlitt who claimed priority in certain criticisms of Malthus, a claim which De Quincey promptly admitted, at the same time disclaiming anything like plagiarism; but it was the group of papers, under the title of *Dialogues of Three Templars* which was by far the most important. That, however, was not all; for later during the thirties while De Quincey was connected with *Blackwood's Magazine*, he was eager again

and again to write on economic subjects, although he was balked by the lack of interest in his editors; but at long last, in 1842 *Blackwood's* did publish for him in book form *The Logic of Political Economy*. All these books and papers were alike in that primarily they were concerned with expounding the theories of Ricardo on the one hand, and in pointing out the errors of Malthus and other earlier and contemporary economists, on the other.

So technical are these various articles and books that they have but slight claim to literary interest; they are hardly literature at all, except as they are written in a scrupulous English style. They are included among De Quincey's published works; but the casual reader in these days will hardly enjoy them. Yet this series of productions has considerable interest to the student of De Quincey, not so much for the ideas set forth, as for the way in which they are presented and, above all, for the light they throw upon his methods of thought and his qualities of argumentation.

Whenever De Quincey turns to economic discussion, his thought and style become closely integrated, except, perhaps, in certain parts of *The Logic of Political Economy*, which was written with great difficulty and in the most painful circumstances. In most of the papers he obviously delights in a theme into which he can set his teeth with vigour; and he finds satisfaction in subtle distinctions and definitions. He handles his topics in the spirit of scholastic logic appropriate to the abstract economy of the time; and in scholastic logic he was, as he more than once proclaims, an expert. He is alert to the carelessness of definition and unwarranted deductions of Malthus, Say, and others; his love for the meticulous finds full play. In such moods, his style of necessity grows careful and precise beyond its wont, the result of deliberate exactness in thinking highly characteristic of his mind at its best. He is, moreover, intensely in earnest, for he feels that he is possessed by truth of importance.

From first to last, after De Quincey had, as it were, discovered him, Ricardo was one of his major prophets; and it was to elucidate the ideas which had been set forth by Ricardo not always too clearly, that De Quincey writes. Now and

then he finds a minor point in which he thinks Ricardo is in error; but for the most part, the articles defend Ricardo against the world as the spokesman of new and irrefutable truth. Thus De Quincey sets forth his theories of value, rent, wages, etc., with elaborate analysis and illustration, if often with unusual brevity and point. It is the theory of value which for De Quincey is the veritable corner-stone of the whole structure of Political Economy. He who understands that, he tells us, will find the whole science easy. But the ideas involved in these discussions have been through the course of years by many writers repeated, revised, rejected; so that to us they seem as remote as scientific hypotheses of a century ago. In his own time, certain of De Quincey's papers brought forth occasional opposition or confirmation; but we must conclude, I fear, that they have little historical significance.

Among other characteristics of these economic papers, it is worth while to point out the frequency with which De Quincey uses mathematical formulae for the elucidation or for the expression of ideas. It is an indication of the charm which the science or the art of mathematics had for him. He dreamed at one time in his earlier years of devoting himself to the development of a new mathematics; and his interest in this play of the mind is closely akin to his feeling for abstract logic. Throughout his works he often uses a mathematical equation or expression as an intellectual short-cut; mathematical exactness was no less a reality in his intellectual make-up than the romantic or mystical strain; and its constant presence, though usually hidden from his readers, is not to be forgotten as a partial explanation for that solid foundation of all his work, that firmness and vigour in his character, which, with all his weaknesses, procrastinations and futilities, are unmistakably innate.

#### IV

ON 24 April 1824, he wrote to Hessey, 'You may expect me every hour in London.'<sup>7</sup> On May 6 he was still at Fox Ghyll. Something extraordinary had happened. 'What was it? — I

<sup>7</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS.

believe that few men who have ever lived can have conducted a process of argument demanding such unremitting vigilance of logic and attention as the Dialogues which I composed last month at the same time when they were contending with such a case as mine. From the peculiarities of my case in law, — I stood so situated that unless a long and most elaborate statement were drawn up for the opinion of counsel — hastily transmitted to London — and every step taken with the utmost rapidity for filing a bill in chancery and obtaining an injunction, — I had no prospect but that of quitting England immediately — in order to avoid a series of nearly a dozen arrests which must have proved fatal to some important pecuniary interests. . . . And if to avoid all this, I resolved to quit England — How? I, that have never yet mustered as much money as would carry me half-way to London — but that I was obliged to pay it away on some immediate demand or other before I could move, in what way was I to do this? — Thus the colour of my life for many years, possibly, and certainly the prevention of a most swindling trick which would have robbed me of more than 300 pounds, depended upon immediate exertion. Even to make my statement, I had to seek for (and to read up and down amongst) bills — letters, etc. since the year 1814; — amongst many *thousands* of such papers. Where were they? In the house I inhabit? No: but the house I *did* inhabit in Grasmere — three miles off to an inch: here then a journey of 6 miles daily: — but my time is short. — I conclude — that your charge is rash and unadvised' — namely, of cruel delay in producing the manuscript of the *Dialogues*. 'I do no cruelties; but am as just a man — as considerate a man — as any that lives in London, not excepting the best. And as to benignity and forbearance and indulgent attention to other men's feelings, if there were but 10 men in London that in that point bore to me the proportion of 1 to 1000 — London wd. be better insured against fire coming down from Heaven than I fear it is by all your Insurance Offices (the Law Insurance included even, tho' I know not whether that insures against fire). Ten such men, I shall content myself with affirming, would [save] London; and she would not be corrupted to the degree she is. I am

incapable of cruelty: and I abhor the bloody world, because it wallows in cruelty. For the spirit of sneering and sarcasm, which is the life of your London conversation, is the subtlest abstract of cruelty and malevolence. Dixi.' <sup>8</sup>

He would send the MS. If he could obtain the money, he would be in London to correct: if possible earlier. And he ended in high spirits: — ' Finally, I am NOT a cruel man; but I will say boldly, in the teeth of all opposition, the most benignant man that perhaps has appeared since the time of St. John.' And in a kind of P.P.S.: — ' In order to reason the case justly, — begin by confessing that Messrs. Hazlitt, Reynolds, etc. have put you to a thousand times more inconvenience in single months than I in a year. This, you know, is a fact. Well, then, — this granted, next let us consider the cause. Mine — that ever since I knew you I have had to struggle with difficulties more like the cases of romance than real life. Theirs — that they got drunk, — went to the play, — had a cold, — gave a party, — or any other reason why! ' Such letters surely point to a highly irritable, even excitable state of mind.

About 1 June 1824 De Quincey finally *was* on his way to London, but was overtaken by illness in Liverpool where he stayed with his old friend Mr. John Merritt; and where he still was on June 12.<sup>9</sup> He reached London about midsummer, and vanished from our ken until September 11, when we know that he was hard at work and just beginning to translate Walladmor, of which he gave so amusing an account in *Tait's Magazine* in 1838.

V

ONE incident of his arrival in London, preserved by himself, was not conducive to raising his spirits for the fresh struggle before him. He has told the story in his paper in *Tait's Magazine* for 1841, to which Masson has given the title ' The Story of a Libel.' Arriving in the early morning, tired with the long journey, he was reading *The Times* at breakfast, when among the announcements of forthcoming publications, he

<sup>8</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. To Hessey.

<sup>9</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS.; letter from Mrs. De Quincey to Hessey.

noticed the advertisement of the satirical journal, *John Bull*. 'My heart palpitated a little,' he wrote, 'on seeing myself announced as the principal theme for the malice of the present number. . . . The exposure and *depluming* (to borrow a good word from the fine old rhetorician Fuller) of the "hum-bugs" of the age — *that* was announced as the regular business of the journal; and the only question which remained to be settled was the more or less of the degree; and also one other question even more interesting still, viz. whether personal abuse were intermingled with literary.' There might be 'insinuations or downright assertion in the libel requiring instant public notice.' He at once set forth to buy a copy — a quest which carried him to the very publishers' shop in Smithfield, appropriately located in 'the aceldama, or slaughtering quarter of London.' He bought all four numbers of the journal, and in the 'elegant promenades of Smithfield read the lucubrations of my libeller,' presumably the redoutable Maginn. 'Suffice it here to say,' he went on, 'that, calm as I am now [1841], and careless on recalling the remembrance of this brutal libel, at that time I was convulsed with wrath. As respected myself, there was a depth of malignity in the article which struck me as perfectly mysterious' — the more so, as in the other articles, on Sir Humphry Davy, etc., 'it was clear that the malice was assumed. . . . But, in my case, the man flew like a bull-dog at the throat, with a pertinacity and *acharnement* of malice that would have caused me to laugh immoderately, had it not been for one intolerable wound to my feelings.' The name of his wife was dragged in! 'I stood in those hideous shambles of Smithfield: upwards I looked to the clouds, downwards to the earth, for vengeance. . . .

'This slander seemed to have been built upon some special knowledge of me; for I had often spoken with horror of those who could marry persons in a condition which obliged them to obedience' — the article declared that his wife had been his servant-maid before he married her, and had often made his bed before she ascended it. — 'The libeller, therefore, *did* seem to have some knowledge of my particular opinions; yet, in other points, either from sincere ignorance or from affectation, and by way of turning aside suspicion, he cer-

tainly manifested a non-acquaintance with facts relating to me that must have been familiar enough to all within my circle.' <sup>10</sup> It was bad enough to have such an article appear in a London magazine; but the pain must have been greatly deepened to have it in large part reprinted shortly afterwards in his home county by his old antagonist, *The Kendal Chronicle*.<sup>11</sup>

## VI

THERE were, however, pleasanter sides to his London sojourn of 1824-5; for through his literary work De Quincey made two friends — Matthew Davenport Hill and Charles Knight; and through them we have some glimpses of him. Hill was a lawyer, a brother of Frederick Hill, the prison reformer, and of Sir Rowland Hill, later famous for his work in the post-office. They were sons of Thomas Wright Hill, a Unitarian, and a warm supporter of Priestley in his dark days of persecution, but above all the famous head of Hazelwood School near Birmingham and an initiator in educational methods. In 1822 Matthew Hill, who with his brothers had previously helped his father in the school, published anonymously a volume of essays upon experiments in education which his family had been putting into practice, and the volume was reviewed by De Quincey in *The London Magazine* for April and May, 1824. Hill who was at the time a young barrister, read the two articles and recognized the hand of the Opium

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, III, 172 ff.

<sup>11</sup> The attack was certainly very nasty. The following passages from *The Kendal Chronicle* will indicate the tone: — 'Instigated by hunger, it is now three years since this man wrote the *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. . . . The article made a sensation, which was kept alive by those acts of puffing which we all know. Medical men saw that it was all nonsense; men of taste perceived that it was mere fudge. . . . In the last sentence we called this fellow Quincey — and that because it is right. He is a humbug even in his name. . . . Conceive an animal about five feet high, propped on two trap-sticks, which have the size but not the delicate proportions of rolling pins, with a comical sort of indescribable body, and a head of most portentous magnitude . . . as for the face, its utter grotesqueness and inanity is totally beyond the reach of pen to describe. . . . As we are fond of biographical researches, we should request Quincey to give us an extract from his parish register, dating the birth of his first child, and also his marriage with Electra. It would be an important addition to the chronology of the County.'

The article in *John Bull* is referred to with no uncertain condemnation in the *Noctes Ambrosianae* in *Blackwood's* for October 1825; (Page, I, 269); a reflection of Wilson's friendship.



Eater; and after De Quincey's arrival in London obtained his address and called upon him at his lodgings in Chelsea not far from Hill's cottage.

The records of the acquaintance thus begun are meagre; but it seems to have been warm. During the following months De Quincey spent much time at the Hills', delighting Mrs. Hill with his conversation through long evenings when she sat up for her husband. De Quincey was always fond of the society of women, and had had too little opportunity to indulge this taste in previous London visits.<sup>12</sup> At the Hills' hospitable board, he associated with the group of men collected through the medium of *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* — Macaulay, St. Leger, etc. — usually at Sunday morning breakfasts.<sup>13</sup>

From this connexion with Hill, sprang an extremely interesting letter — a letter from De Quincey to John Wilson, dated 25 February 1825<sup>14</sup> — a delightfully friendly letter, begging Wilson not to let *Blackwood's Magazine* answer the praise of Hill's book in *The Edinburgh Review* by a damning retort. Hill's fear was, wrote De Quincey, 'that Blackwood may come as Nemesis, and compel him to regorge any puffing and cramming which Tiff has put into his pocket.' He did not ask a favourable review, but merely not a severe one. The letter was friendly on De Quincey's part towards Hill; but it seems also to have reopened communication with Wilson, which was a little later to have important results.

'As for myself, — though I have written not as one who labours under much depression of mind, — the fact is, I *do* so. At this time calamity presses upon me with a heavy hand: — I am quite free of opium' — this presumably cannot be accepted *auspied de la lettre* — 'but it has left the liver, which is the Achilles heel of almost every human fabric, subject to affections which are tremendous for the weight of wretched-

<sup>12</sup> *Memoir of W. D. Hill* by his daughters, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> The acquaintance lasted for some years, so that in 1828, Hill called upon De Quincey in Edinburgh and wrote back to his wife about him: — 'I found De Quincey, who has for the tenth time renounced opium, which he said he had not tasted for one hundred and eighty days. He received me with great warmth and spoke of you and the children with much interest.' (*Ibid.*, p. 85.)

<sup>14</sup> *Gordon, Wilson*, II, 76.

ness attached to them. To fence with these with one hand, and with the other to maintain the war with the wretched business of hack author, with all its horrible degradations, — is more than I am able to bear. At this moment I have not a place to hide my head in. Something I meditate — I know not what — "*Itaque e conspectu omnium abiit.*" With a good publisher and leisure to premeditate what I write, I might yet liberate myself: after which, having paid everybody, I would slink into some dark corner — educate my children — and show my face in the world no more. . . .

'I beg my kind regards to Mrs. Wilson and my young friends, whom I remember with so much interest as I last saw them at Elleray, — and am, my dear Wilson, very affectionately yours, Thomas De Quincey.'

Charles Knight, the proprietor and editor of *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*, also adds his mite to the evidence of De Quincey's life during this period in London. He became acquainted with the Opium Eater in July 1824, apparently through De Quincey's contributions to his periodical — two stories translated from the German, *The Incognito; or Count Fitz-Hum*, and Tieck's *The Love Charm*. These were De Quincey's only contributions to Knight's publications; De Quincey had broken away from Taylor and Hessey to this extent. Knight seems to have been on very friendly terms with him, calling upon him, taking him for months into his own house during the summer of 1825, and giving him good advice in regard to his financial troubles. But the friendship was apparently never close; although, in 1829, De Quincey wrote Knight an amazing letter of invitation to visit him at The Nab. Knight, however, adds two or three anecdotes which have their value.

'Vast as were his acquirements, intuitive as was his appreciation of character and the motives of human actions, unembarrassed as was his demeanour, pleasant and even mirthful his table-talk, De Quincey was as helpless in every position of responsibility as when he faced "stony-hearted Oxford Street" looking for the lost one. He was constantly beset by idle fears and vain imaginings. His sensitiveness was so extreme, in combination with the almost ultra-courtesy of a gentleman, that he hesitated to trouble a servant with any personal requests with-

out a long prefatory apology. My family were in the country in the summer of 1825, when he was staying at my house in Pall Mall, East. A friend or two had met him at dinner and I had walked part of the way home with one of them. When I returned, I tapped at his chamber door to bid him good night. He was sitting at the open window habited as a prize-fighter when he enters the ring. "You will take cold," I exclaimed. "Where is your shirt?" "I have not a shirt, my shirts are unwashed." "But why not tell the servant to send them to the laundress?" "Ah! how could I pretend to do that in Mrs. Knight's absence?"<sup>15</sup>

Knight gives another anecdote of De Quincey's helplessness in practical affairs. Knight had been to Windsor, and on his return he found that De Quincey had taken his box away, leaving word that he had gone home. 'I knew,' Knight continues, 'that he was waiting for a remittance from his mother, which would satisfy some clamorous creditors, and enable him to rejoin his family in Grasmere. Two or three days after, I heard that he was still in town. I obtained a clue to his lodging, and found him in a miserable place on the Surrey side of Waterloo Bridge. He had received a large draft on a London banker at twenty-one days' sight.' He had gone to the banker and found that he could not draw the money for three weeks; but because ~~he~~ he could not face the task of apologizing to the servants for his return to Knight's house, he preferred to seek wretched lodgings. The possibility of finding some one to advance the money on the bill evidently had not occurred to him until Knight suggested it and undertook to discount the draft himself.<sup>16</sup>

## VII

In January 1825, Taylor and Hessey sold *The London Magazine*, and De Quincey lost that connexion. There seems to have been little left for him in London after that; and yet he lingered, presumably finding odd jobs, yet without enough ready money to go back to Westmorland. As we have seen, he spent part of the summer with Knight; but he left London probably in late July. Certainly by November he was back

<sup>15</sup> *Passages of a Working Life*; quoted in Page, I, 262.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted in Page I, 263.

among the mountains at Rydal Nab, where his family had been living with the Simpsons,<sup>17</sup> for Fox Ghyll had been sold by the owner in the spring and the De Quincey family had been forced to move out.

During these many months, De Quincey was, as always, unable to earn enough to keep himself and his family. Had it not been for help from his mother and uncle, he would indeed literally have starved. We have concrete evidence of this help in a letter from his mother of 13 January 1825.<sup>18</sup> Colonel Penson was coming home to England, giving up an income of £4000 a year to live on £700. He was taking over the major expenses of Westhay so that Mrs. Quincey was in some measure free of large drains upon her income. For the present, therefore, although she could not bind herself indefinitely and permanently, until Thomas's 'literary productions [should] bring him profit enough,' she offered him £100 a year. This allowance was apparently continued to the time of her death in 1846.

#### VIII

BUT lack of money had not been the only cause of worry during the stay in London. We have a letter from De Quincey to Dorothy Wordsworth, dated Saturday, 16 July 1825, which needs no explanation.

My dear Madam,

I am at this time in great agitation of mind; and I solicit your assistance in a way when [sic] you can give it effectually. — Call, I beg and pray you, my dear Miss Wordsworth, on my poor wife — who suffers greatly from a particular case of embarrassment affecting me just now. What this is, and how it arose, I began to explain in a very long letter: but repeated interruptions from the Press have not allowed me to finish it. Suffice it however to say — that in a few weeks I shall be free from all distresses of the kind which have so long weighed upon me. Meantime, she writes me the most moving and heart-rending letters — not complaining, but simply giving utterance to her grief. In her very last letter she concludes by begging me 'not to take her grief amiss': and in fact she disturbs my fortitude so much, that I cannot do half what I else could. For my fear is — that being thrown entirely upon herself, with no soul

<sup>17</sup> *Mems.*, II, 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 128.

(unless her eldest sister) to speak a word of comfort to her — she will suffer her grief to grow upon her, and in her present uncomfortable situation will fret herself into illness. If that should happen, I know what I must look for next: and I shall never have any peace of mind, or a happy home again. Assure her that all will be well in a very few weeks; and the greater part in a fortnight. — What a sad thing then that she should give way to a momentary pressure, just at the time when I have first a prospect of for ever getting over any pressure of that kind. — Oh! Miss Wordsworth, — I sympathised with you — how deeply and fervently — in your trials 13 years ago: — now, when I am prostrate for a moment — and the hand of a friend would enable me to rise before I am crushed, — do not refuse me this service. But I need not conjure you in this way: for you are full of compassion and goodness to those whose hearts are overburthened with long affliction. — What I wish is — that you would give my wife the relief of talking over her distress with one whom she can feel to be sympathising with her. — To do this with less constraint, perhaps you will be so good as to go over and drink tea with her. And let me know, if you please, how she is in health: — Direct to me — To the care of Charles Knight, Esqr., Pall Mall East, London.

Say whatever you can think of to raise and support her spirits: beg her not to lie down too much as she is apt to do in states of dejection, but to walk in the fields when it is cool: and to take some *solid* food, which she is very apt to neglect. — She is amused by newspapers: perhaps you could lend her a few just for the present, until I am able to send one down.

Having written so much of my longer letter I shall finish and send it on Monday or Tuesday. I must beg you to excuse my putting you to the expense of 2 letters: which, in my circumstances, I should not have done.

If I had any cheerful news from home, — I am *now* in a condition to extricate myself in 28 days.

God bless you, my dear Miss Wordsworth, — stand my friend at this moment.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> GW. MSS. The signature has been cut off.

CHAPTER XVI  
EDINBURGH AGAIN

1825-1830

I

TOWARDS the end of July 1825, De Quincey returned to Westmorland without any definite literary connexions. London was closed to him; from now on, the drift of events carried him towards Edinburgh again.

In spite of the conversations with Taylor and Woodhouse in London in the autumn of 1821 in which Wilson was so strangely discussed and distrusted, the friendship of Wilson and De Quincey continued outwardly unabated. Wilson showed the most friendly concern. Annually he spent some or all of the summer months at Elleray;<sup>1</sup> and there is every probability that when De Quincey was at the Lakes the two men not infrequently met. Towards the end of 1825 we have two letters from Wilson — one undated but probably about November 1, and one of November 12, both full of solicitude.<sup>2</sup>

In the undated letter Wilson wrote on behalf of *Janus*, an annual set on foot by Wilson and Lockhart to be first published on January first, 1826, a year-book which died with the initial number. 'I shall be looking every day for your communications, which are much needed, I assure you. I almost hope that some beautiful things are winging their way hither at this time from Rydal Cottage.<sup>3</sup> As soon as you have any one thing complete, send it off by *letter*, for the publisher is in a fever, and the volume must be shipped off for London in time to be published there, *some week before the New Year*. This, he says, is the meaning of the appellation JANUS. Remember that everything you think good, on whatever subject, and however short, original or translated, will answer our purpose. Without your timely assistance the

<sup>1</sup> He was there in 1823-4-5-6. Gordon, *Christopher North*, II, 53, 68, 84, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Memls.*, II, 48 and Page, I, 270.

<sup>3</sup> The De Quinceys were still at Rydal Nab with the Simpsons.

double faced old gentleman will assuredly be damped.' But no contributions appeared from Rydal. On November 12 Wilson again wrote to 'My dear Plato,' pleading even more earnestly for contributions. Wilson wanted help; he wanted De Quincey's help; and he wanted to help De Quincey. 'Do not be teased with my importunities,' he ended, 'but attribute them partly to selfish and partly to friendly motives.' <sup>4</sup>

It was not, however, only to contribute to *Janus* that Wilson urged him. 'I wish earnestly that you would read Brown and Welch as soon as you can. I have undertaken to write a review of the lectures for the first number of the "Quarterly," edited by Lockhart;' — Lockhart was to begin his editorship with the March number, 1826 — 'and with your assistance (to be acknowledged in the way of business, and felt in the way of friendship) a creditable article may be composed. . . . I have begun to write upon the work; and should you think it safe to assist me, and to confide your views to such hands, I do not despair of being able to interweave them with my own in a way not unsatisfactory to your mind. Of course the whole article would be submitted to you before publication.'

Such co-operation did not appeal to De Quincey who was jealously independent. At least there seems to have been no response. Then Wilson went on, surely prompted only by friendship, to assure De Quincey that Lockhart would be happy to have his assistance in the *Quarterly*. 'He knows your great talents, and will, I know, act in the most gentlemanly spirit to all contributors. A noble review of Kant would, in good time, be valuable to him and you; and, master as you are of German literature and philosophy, I do indeed hope that you may become a contributor.' <sup>5</sup> Yet for nearly a year De Quincey lingered on at Grasmere or Rydal — still silent.

## II

DE QUINCEY had written on Kant in *The Westmorland Gazette* and in *The London Magazine*; and he had doubtless talked to Wilson about him *ad infinitum*. Why should he not, indeed, write 'a noble review of Kant'? There is no

<sup>4</sup> Page, I, 270.

<sup>5</sup> Page, I, 271.

answer. And yet it will be worth while to pause for a moment over his philosophical essays in lieu thereof.

As a philosopher De Quincey is disappointing. He had almost a passion for reading philosophical works, ancient and modern, famous and obscure; and his enthusiasm for the philosophical field led him for a number of years in his youth to plan, or perhaps to dream of, a *magnum opus*, which should synthesize all philosophies into a new and comprehensive system. Temperament, health, external conditions hampered him in all large endeavours; they fastened upon him, if it was not inherent in him from the start, the habit of short flights. Thus under the practical necessity of writing articles for magazines aimed at the general public, De Quincey failed to become the philosophical writer which intellectually he would seem destined to have been.

He knew with critical precision all that previous philosophers had thought and written; and upon that knowledge he brought to bear his long training in formal and scholastic logic. Yet with his love of solving puzzles and focusing upon minute points, only sometimes crucial; with his delight in correcting errors, no matter how small, he merely darts hither and yon, pecking, as it were, at logical discrepancies or contradictions. To use one of his own distinctions, he tended towards a negative rather than a positive mind; a mind discovering 'by its acuteness not any positive truths, but the negative (i.e. errors) of other people.'

Perhaps the real quality of his philosophical thinking is found rather in his love of logic and mathematics; in the methods of thought into which logic or the mathematical formulation of conceptions drove him. There was a great deal of the scholastic in him; he was Aristotelian, however much he might decry 'the Master of those who know.' He would under other auspices have been a worthy successor to Thomas Aquinas. But nowhere in his works does he set down in any intelligible way his own philosophy. One must patch together bits, and then without any certainty that one is constructing a valid unity. He threw over Hume and Locke; he stood a transcendentalist with Kant, admiring his genius, his creative power, his sincerity, his fearlessness, in



spite of a persistent abhorrence of Kant's hostility to Christianity. It is of Kant that he speaks most often, returning to him in his works and thoughts again and again. Yet only once in De Quincey's fourteen volumes does he expound, and then not too thoroughly, Kant's central theories. Instead he plays with Kant's minor works or unessential ideas. Of other philosophers he speaks with relative rareness and often with dispraise or scorn. Philosophically minded he was; at his best brilliantly cogent in his use of logical processes; but in his thinking as in his writing, he lacked apparent wholeness, owing perhaps to his deductive methods; for of induction he seems to be but slightly aware. He belonged to the pre-modern world.

Not only did he fall short of being an original thinker in a philosophical sense; he also missed a great opportunity. He knew German and German literature and philosophy; and the tremendous philosophical movement in the north of Europe which had been seething for more than a generation was crying out to be interpreted to the English public. De Quincey should have been the man to interpret it; to do what Coleridge and Carlyle in their vague ways were attempting. He now and again declared that he was intending to do just that. But he never did; else his position in the history of English thought in the nineteenth century would be much more important than it is.

### III

WE must now turn to trace De Quincey's movements through these lightly documented years between 1825 and 1830.

He spent most of the winter of 1826-7 in Edinburgh, returning to Westmorland in the spring. Again, in the summer of 1827 he was back in Edinburgh with the intention of remaining; for in October he sent for his two oldest children, William and Margaret, to join him — he went as far as Carlisle to meet them — in order that they might go to school in the northern Capital. They all apparently returned to Rydal for the summer; and once more in the autumn of 1828 De Quincey and the two children, this time accompanied by Mrs. De Quincey, went back to Edinburgh, leaving the

younger children in care of the Simpson grandparents. They lived at 18 Pitt Street for a time and then moved to Porteus' Lodgings, 19 Duncan Street, where they remained until 12 June 1829.<sup>6</sup> Once more they all returned to Rydal where they stayed for the better part of a year. We next hear of De Quincey on 18 June 1830 living as the guest of Wilson in Edinburgh and of the rest of the family soon after lodging at Lingstube, near Penrith, a place, apparently, near one of Margaret's married sisters.

Mrs. De Quincey went to Edinburgh to help in looking after the two children; and for change of air and scene; for she had been ill. But the change did little for her at the moment. The winter of 1828-9 was a painful one for the family because of sickness and anxiety. Mrs. Quincey wrote to her son on 23 February 1829 out of her fears as to conditions. 'I am so exceedingly anxious for some further Tidings that I can no longer endure the feverish watching of the post-hour day by day; not only Margaret's state, but your whole condition I would know, if I possibly could; for you may remember that you not only felt very fearful apprehensions alive as to the twofold evils of your wife's affliction, but also made me feel that your own health and spirits were much broken, as well as, by implication at least, to draw something very like conclusion that on the 14th. of this month your resources would be closed up. Now, the whole account, so much beyond most former grievous communications, has left an abiding foreboding with me on all and every part of your trouble.'<sup>7</sup> She had no intention of standing aloof from his family distress; she had called upon Colonel Penson to assist, and she had no doubt that he would do so. De Quincey had been appealing for financial help again. But it was the state of Margaret's health which most disturbed his mother. On April 18 Mrs. De Quincey was still anxious; and she begged Thomas to let his uncle hear news of his wife. But there was another anxiety. 'I wonder it does not occur to you that I can hardly help fearing, since what you said of William and your promise of a letter in four

<sup>6</sup> In October 1829, De Quincey's friends the Hills paid him a visit among the Lakes. On 14 January 1830, he wrote to Wilson a letter postmarked Kendal (Bl. MSS.); on March 3, he wrote to Blackwood from Westmorland.

<sup>7</sup> *Mems.*, II, 166.

days on 28th March, that something dreadful may have occurred about William — or as you were sick with grief then . . . you may now by more channels than one be drinking deeply of sorrow.' <sup>a</sup>

Of William's illness we know nothing. Perhaps it was a premonitory attack of the disease which killed him in 1835. We can only suppose that Mrs. Quincey's illness was a return of the melancholia with which she was not infrequently afflicted.

## IV

IN 1826 Blackwood was ready to forget his previous impatience with De Quincey in the light of his present fame — pricked no doubt by the thought that if he had been more tactful, his magazine might have won the honour of bringing out the *Confessions*. Certainly he saw that De Quincey would now, as he would not have done six years earlier, bring great prestige to *Blackwood's*. Whatever the stages of the *rapprochement*, De Quincey began his close and long connection with *Blackwood's Magazine* in the November issue, 1826, with the first article in a series under the general title *Gallery of the German Prose Writers*, namely, *Lessing with a Translation from his Laocoon*, an article continued in the January number of 1827. <sup>o</sup>

He was in Edinburgh in early November; probably before, if as seems likely he was on hand to correct the proofs for the November number. At least he had been gone from Rydal some time before 16 November 1826, when Dorothy Wordsworth wrote him a report of his family's welfare. She was still mindful of the letter of appeal he had sent to her in July 1825, and of his anxieties in absence. She had been away from Rydal for some nine months; and one of her first acts after her return was to call upon Mrs. De Quincey and to report to her husband.

<sup>a</sup> *Memls.*, II, 168.

<sup>o</sup> A little later there was also a plan afoot, originated by Gillies, to establish a magazine, 'The Argo, or Importer of Foreign Literature.' Sir Walter Scott, Professor Wilson, Sir W. Hamilton, Mr. Colquhoun, and De Quincey were all pledged to write for it. See letter of De Quincey to person unknown, 9 January 1827. MS. in collection of the late Amy Lowell, Harvard University Library. At the moment De Quincey was staying with Wilson.

'I called at your cottage yesterday' — De Quincey had left his family in Dove Cottage — 'having first seen your son William at the head of the school-boys; as it might seem a leader of their noontide games, and Horace among the tribe; both as healthy-looking as the best, and William very much grown. Margaret was in the kitchen, preparing to follow her brothers to school, and I was pleased to see her also looking stout and well, and much grown. Mrs. De Quincey was seated by the fire above stairs with her baby on her knee. She rose and received me cheerfully, as a person in perfect health, and does indeed seem to have had an extraordinary recovery; and as little suffering as could be expected. The babe looks as if it would thrive, and is what we call a nice child, neither big nor little.<sup>10</sup>

'Mrs. De Quincey seemed on the whole in very good spirits; but with something of sadness in her manner, she told me that you were not likely to be very soon at home. She then said that you had at present some literary employments at Edinburgh; and had, besides, had an offer (or something to this effect) of a permanent engagement, the nature of which she did not know; but that you hesitated about accepting it, as it might necessitate you to settle in Edinburgh. To this I replied, "Why not settle there for the time at least that this engagement lasts? Lodgings are cheap in Edinburgh, and provisions and coal not dear. Of these facts, I had some weeks' experience four years ago." I then added that it was my firm opinion that you could never regularly keep up to your engagements at a distance from the press; and, said I, "Pray tell him so when you write." She replied, "Do write yourself." Now I could not refuse to give her pleasure by so doing, especially being assured that my letter would not be wholly worthless to you, having such agreeable news to send of your family. The little cottage and everything seemed comfortable.

'I do not presume to take the liberty of advising the acceptance of this engagement, or of that; only I would venture to request you to consider well the many impediments to literary employments to be regularly carried on in limited time, at a distance from the press, in a small house, and in perfect solitude. You must well know that it is a true and faithful concern for your interests and those of your family, that prompts me to call your attention to this point; and, if you think that I am mistaken, you will not, I am sure, take it ill that I have thus freely expressed my opinion.'

<sup>10</sup> This sounds as if Dorothy Wordsworth were referring to a new baby. If so, it must be Paul Frederick who was baptized on 29 April 1827. This hypothesis would put Paul's birthday farther back than is usually done, namely in the autumn of 1826, an hypothesis probably correct.

Then follows a postscript written on Thursday. 'I have been at Grasmere and again seen your wife. She desires me to say that she is particularly anxious to hear from you on her father's account' — evidently in regard to some financial matter. — 'The newspaper continues to come directed to my brother,' who thinks it had better be stopped, 'especially as at present you are not likely to contribute anything to the paper.'<sup>11</sup>

The points to notice in this letter are several. In the first place Dorothy is her usual kindly self, and whatever De Quincey's vagaries, she was always friendly. She gives a picture of De Quincey's family life which we get nowhere else — of his children, healthy, normal, happy. Poor Mrs. De Quincey is sad in her loneliness in her husband's absence. It is further evidence that De Quincey's life was founded on genuine and enduring love. Again, we hear that De Quincey has had an offer of permanent employment, certainly in connection with *Blackwood's*; and while Dorothy does not advise him to take it, she urges that he move his household to Edinburgh — a sensible suggestion not immediately followed. And finally in the postscript there is evidence that De Quincey had been contributing to some newspaper unknown.

v

OF his literary activities during this period from 1826 onward, all that is known is this: — The essay on Lessing and the translation of parts of the *Laocoon* for *Blackwood's* were followed in February 1827, by the *Last Days of Immanuel Kant*; and in the same number, *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts*, part one; the second not appearing until November 1839. Then a year later, in March 1828, came the *Toilette of the Hebrew Lady*, a compilation from the German of Hartmann's *Die Hebräerin am Putztische und als Braut*, 1809. In August 1830 appeared *Kant in his Miscellaneous Essays*. With the exception of *Murder as one of the Fine Arts*, all the papers were concerned with German philosophy and thought. But they are all massive and come from a mind less shaken than that of a few years before which had produced so often somewhat limping and fragmentary contributions to

<sup>11</sup> *Wordsworth Family Letters*, II, 293 ff.

the later numbers of the *London Magazine*. Whatever his physical frailties and his financial worries, De Quincey reappears with his full intellectual stature, not always inspired, it may be, but powerful and broad in his grasp and scope.

## VI

OF his translations and his adaptations from the German it is unnecessary to speak, but of one of the contributions of these years, I must say a few words. *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* is among his strangest productions. It reveals in an enduring masterpiece some of the most curious sides of the man. We have seen in the narrative of his connexion with *The Westmorland Gazette*, his fascination with murders and murder trials, so that the columns of that paper were filled with accounts of murder cases chosen to fill up space not otherwise provided for, because of their especial ghastliness or mystery. Nine years later he wrote the first of the Murder papers; twelve years later still, the second; and in his *Collected Works*, in 1854, he added the masterly 'Postscript.' Among his later letters are two in which he analyzed elaborately for his youngest daughter another contemporary murder. And the careful reader of his works will find from time to time, as for example in *The Caesars*, comments or illustrations which spring from the same prepossession. Murders had for him a life-long interest and might suggest something unhealthy in his make-up.

The fact is that De Quincey was singularly gentle in his nature, passionately devoted to children, sympathetic with animals, considerate of women; a man for whom violence and suffering were fundamentally abhorrent. He was also keenly alive to the preciousness of human life and personality, as many protests in his works against physical chastisement in schools bear witness. All told, the very fact of murder had by the law of contraries a fascination for him. Perhaps the horrors of his own dreams may have predisposed him to dwell upon the horrors of life. But from another angle the murders had an evident appeal, in that they offered him an opportunity to reconstruct motives and circumstances with all the delight which comes from the solving of puzzles. It is not hard to

fancy De Quincey sitting alone and depressed, necessarily idle, perhaps, as far as serious work was concerned, amusing himself by finding answers to the problems of fact and psychology, involved in every murder.

One of the most striking things connected with the first two papers of *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, and one highly illustrative of certain sides of De Quincey, is the fact that they are written in a humorous vein. The first paper, the lecture by the President of the Society of the Connoisseurs in Murder, is in the best style of ironic humour, extravagant in its original intention, and carried out with macabre detail and astonishing wealth of examples drawn from literature and history ingeniously and unexpectedly applied and misapplied. The irony is set forth in a spirit of impish seriousness. Most of the effect is gained by the application of humour to a gruesome subject. Indeed, I believe that one can discern, after the time of *The Westmorland Gazette*, a touch of humour in most of his references to murders, with the single exception, perhaps, of the Postscript in which he was purposely seeking the effect of horror. Perhaps this attitude is comparable with that of Charles Lamb, who was seized by a desire to laugh at funerals. Perhaps, too, we can see in this humorous attitude a corrective to our inclination to regard his prepossession with murders as an expression of abnormality.

But it is not horrible subjects only which call forth his humorous note. Humour is a mood into which De Quincey frequently falls, even though, as is often the case, he gives the impression that he is forcing the note in an attempt to give lightness to a passage which for some reason or another threatened to bore his readers or himself. At such moments he was inclined to have his jest with some dignified person or serious idea, like a mischievous boy. At lighter moments and especially in his later years, he seems to have indulged largely in humorous talk; and his letters, most often those to his daughters, are full of playful quality. But in many of his papers his outbreaks of humour are not entirely convincing; they would have been more amusing in conversation in which a glint of the eye or an intonation of the voice would help the words to give rise to more comfortable laughter. The essence

of his peculiar humour is irony, exaggeration to the point of the ridiculous. His humour was humour and not wit. There was no crisp turn of thought or phrase. His mental processes were too massive for electric expressions. He almost never laughed himself, we are told. Repartee and sudden epigram were beyond his range. With him, his humour was an elaboration of an extravagant idea, too often sadly misapplied, as in the paper on Joan of Arc; but in the Murder papers it was finely used.

De Quincey's humour was only casual; in no sense pervasive; not constantly latent as in Carlyle or Richter. It seems to be a separate stop on his organ which could be pulled out for deliberate effect by way of relief and variety. When it is pulled, the result gives the impression that it is not used of necessity. So one feels, for example, in the *Spanish Military Nun*, where by humour he tries to raise a somewhat brutal and monotonous tale into the ironic mood. A better and far more spontaneous example is seen in his papers on Walladmor in which the ridiculousness of the situation and the material of the forged novel bring forth natural gaiety. Thus, in spite of a few brilliant successes, De Quincey can hardly be classed among the great English humourists. His humour lacks depth, universality, seriousness. It plays upon the surface; it twists and tumbles, it makes ridiculous, but it lacks the tenderness, the sympathy, the humaneness which marks English humour as unique.

But to return to the Murder papers. In the third section, the 'Postscript' of 1854, which tells the story of the Williams and the McKean murders, we have an example of work as seriously magnificent as the *Dream Fugues* themselves. His method is that which he uses in his *Flight of the Tartar Tribe*. He takes the bare facts of the murders as he gathered them from the public press; and by recreating through analysis and imagination the situations, the atmosphere, the motives, the actions, and by bringing to bear his strong sense of the dramatic and his power of gaining suspense, he builds up a narrative of massive interest. The deliberateness of his style, the balance and poise of his rhythms, the circuitous approach to events inevitably coming, the implied terror, the details of



the tragedies all are woven into a sustained and moving whole. To read it is to be conscious that one is in the power of a great and deliberate artist.

## VII

DURING the years after 1825 things were going ill at The Nab. Margaret's grandfather, William Park, had died in that year and left the estate to her mother, Mrs. John Simpson; but so encumbered with debts due to lawsuits, arrearages of rent, etc., that by 1827-8 it looked as if desperate measures would have to be taken, either by selling the cattle or by selling the estate itself. At this juncture an ingenious plan was evolved, presumably by De Quincey, for saving the situation, which if it had been possible to carry through would not only have preserved The Nab for the Simpsons but would also have made the estate an inheritance for the De Quincey family in perpetuity. It was an attempt on De Quincey's part to benefit his parents-in-law; and indirectly to benefit himself and his children.<sup>12</sup>

The affair is uncomfortably complicated, but it may be simplified as follows: John Simpson was in immediate need of £900 to pay off mortgages and other encumbrances upon the estate. He valued The Nab at £3000; but he was not a man of business and was not in touch with money-lenders. De Quincey was, and agreed to raise a mortgage for him; a thing he proceeded to do during the winter and spring, 1828-9. Then out of a desire on the part of Simpson to leave at his death a legacy of £500 to his favourite grandchild, De Quincey's eldest son, William, Simpson agreed to sell the estate of The Nab to De Quincey, subject to the mortgage finally fixed at £1400, for the sum of £2500. But in return, De Quincey agreed to pay interest of  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  on the equity of £1100; the equity to remain unpaid, during the life-time of John

<sup>12</sup> The transaction, including the correspondence relating to it, was published to the world by Miss Armitt in her volume, *Rydal*, issued by Titus Wilson, Kendal, 1916. Her authority is a batch of letters then recently discovered in the muniment room of Rydal Hall. I can only give a summary of the episode as she presents it, supplemented, however, by a letter not known to her.

Miss Armitt regards the transaction as not too creditable to De Quincey. In this judgment, I differ from her.

Simpson and his wife, aged fifty-eight, and of her brother the half-witted William Park, aged fifty-one. The mortgage money of £1400 was to be divided between Simpson and De Quincey; Simpson to receive £900 and De Quincey £500; and the understanding was that each should be responsible for the interest on his share. When the elder Simpsons and Park should be dead, De Quincey undertook to pay off the equity, namely, the £1100, to the several parties who should be designated in John Simpson's will; and, of course, in consideration of the price of sale, he was to hand over £500 to his son as his grandfather's bequest.

The mortgage was finally secured about the first of April 1829, and was apparently taken out in the name of John Simpson. The title of the estate was then also, apparently, transferred to De Quincey. Thus De Quincey without laying out a penny became a landed proprietor, and, what was immediately of more importance, the possessor of a fortunate £500 to be used as he saw fit. Indeed everybody gained for the moment and nobody lost. The trouble was that interest payments had to be met.

The arrangements for the mortgage were completed about the first of April and De Quincey felt naturally elated at his success. This mood of joy in the consciousness of being the owner of a landed estate, albeit only technically and all too precariously, lasted into the summer, when, established at The Nab, he wrote to Charles Knight inviting him for a visit to Rydal. It is an ebullient letter. 'And now, my friend, think what a glorious Eldorado of milk and butter, and cream-cheeses, and all other dairy products, supposing that you like those things, I can offer you, morning, noon and night. You may absolutely bathe in new milk, or even in cream; and you *shall* bathe, if you like it. I know that you care not much about the luxuries of the dinner-table; else though our luxuries are few and simple, I could offer you some temptations — mountain lamb equal to Welsh; char famous to the antipodes; trout and pike from the very lake within twenty-five feet of our door; bread, such as you have never presumed to dream of, made of our own wheat, not doctored and separated by the miller's process into fine flour and coarse, that is, merely

dirty looking white, but all ground down together, which is the sole receipt (*experto crede*) for having rich, lustrous, red-brown ambrosial bread; new potatoes of celestial earthiness and raciness, which with us last to October; and finally, milk, milk, milk — cream, cream, cream (hear it, thou benighted Londoner!), in which you must and shall bathe.' <sup>13</sup>

But whatever the elation in the summer of 1829, it was sadly pricked by the inevitable bi-annual demands for interest. And the interest was not paid. John Simpson seems never to have been able to pay his share of interest on his £900; perhaps because De Quincey was unable to pay the 3½% due on the equity of £1100; certainly De Quincey found it impossible to pay his interest on his £500. Thus in January 1832 there were threats from the holder of the mortgage that The Nab would be sold. The De Quinceys were in Edinburgh by this time. De Quincey hurried south to raise money to prevent this calamity. Mrs. De Quincey was, naturally enough, much concerned; for The Nab was dear to her, and her parents' situation was distressing. <sup>14</sup>

Back interest, then, was due; John Simpson could not pay his share; 'What others cannot pay, I *must*,' De Quincey wrote. He appealed to his mother, and she, faithful lady, advanced £180 to bring the payments up to date, namely to April 1832. So far so good; but she was obliged to stipulate that to recover this sum, which she could not afford to give outright, she must subtract a certain amount from each payment on the regular allowance she made him. This made the future hopeless. The next interest payment was not met, and after a year's delay The Nab was advertised for sale at the Salutation Inn, Ambleside, in September 1833. <sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Clowes, *Memoir of Charles Knight*, p. 167; the passage here given quoted by Page, I, 265.

<sup>14</sup> Armitt, p. 700; 9 January 1932.

<sup>15</sup> A letter from De Quincey to John Simpson, 27 September 1833, advertised for sale by Messrs. Dulau and Co., London, in 1928, (I have not seen the original) gives an excited epilogue to The Nab transactions.

De Quincey seemed to be unaware of the approaching auction. The estate became a part of the Rydal manor. The mortgage was, of course, paid off from the price received. What became of any money over and above the mortgage of £1400 I do not know. Mrs. Simpson had apparently died during the troubles; John Simpson during his latter days joined the De Quincey family in Edinburgh.

## VIII

AMONG the friends that he made in Edinburgh in 1828, was Carlyle, who, newly married, was living at Comley Bank. The meeting took place at Sir William Hamilton's; and Carlyle wrote of the occasion: — 'This night at Sir W. Hamilton's I reckoned on the whole a pleasant one. Moir was there; a kind, lively, very ingenious *Small*, with whom I am growing very intimate; De Quincey also, though in the *low* stage of his opium-regimen, and looking rather care-stricken; then "Cyril Thornton" or "O'Doherty," Sir William's brother, an exceedingly gentle and wholesome man, and stuttering in his speech, who reminds you much of our East-Lothian Dickinson. . . . Of talk there was no end.' <sup>16</sup> The day was the twelfth of March.

The meeting with De Quincey was doubtless awkward after those depreciatory papers on *Wilhelm Meister* and its translator in *The London Magazine*, in 1824, which must have been in the minds of both. But if there was initial awkwardness, it soon passed, and friendly relations grew up between them. Carlyle in December wrote a letter of introduction to De Quincey to be presented by his friend Henry Inglis; and another letter to Inglis. In the latter he said, 'You will find De Quincey a man of very considerable genius, and labouring in a state of depression (for he is by birth a man of fortune) which renders him still more interesting. He also is a German, a Kantist; a mystic, also I suppose.' The letter to De Quincey was long and cordial, a letter 'to signify that two well-wishers of yours are still alive in these remote moors [i.e., at Craigenputtock] and often thinking of you with the old friendly feeling. My wife encourages me in this innocent purpose: she has learned lately that you were enquiring for her of some female friend; nay, even promising to visit us here — a fact of the most interesting sort to both of us. I am to say, therefore, that your presence at this fireside will diffuse no ordinary gladness over all members of the household; that our warmest welcome, and such solacements as even the desert does not refuse are at any time and at all times in store for one

we love so well. . . . Such a treat it would be to hear the sound of philosophy and literature in the hitherto quite savage wolds.' Then with true Carlylean humour, he set forth a project for founding a sort of colony at Craigenputtock to be called the 'Misanthropic Society,' to consist of 'men of a certain philosophic depth and intensely sensible of the present state of literature;' and he asked, 'would *you* come hither and be king over us; *then* indeed we had made a fair beginning, and the "Bog School" might snap its fingers at the "Lake School" itself, and hope to be one day recognised of all men.' <sup>17</sup>

Such cordiality implies that De Quincey must have seen a good deal of both the Carlyles during their stay at Comley Bank. Yet De Quincey never went to Craigenputtock; and so far as I know, he never saw either of them after they left Edinburgh. The relations ceased but not the memories; for Hogg reports in the fifties that De Quincey recalled how Mrs. Carlyle had nursed him through an illness and won his warm affection. 'She was, indeed, the most angelic woman I ever met with upon this — God's earth,' he said; and begged Hogg, if ever he should meet Carlyle to give him his warm greetings. When in Carlyle's later days, Hogg *did* meet Carlyle and repeated the message, he noted that 'Carlyle started, quivered, and tears sprang to his eyes.' <sup>18</sup>

## IX

It was of these years in Edinburgh — possibly 1827, but more probably 1830 — that Mrs. Gordon, Wilson's daughter wrote, recording the impressions De Quincey made upon her young mind. Wilson lived at 6 Gloucester Place; and there De Quincey was sure of hearty welcome.

'I remember his coming to Gloucester Place one stormy night,' she wrote in the memoir of her father. 'He remained hour after hour, in vain expectation that the waters would assuage and the hurly-burly cease. There was nothing for it but that our visitor should remain all night. The Professor ordered a room to be prepared for him, and they found each other such

<sup>17</sup> Page, I, 278.

<sup>18</sup> Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 189.

good company that this accidental detention was prolonged without difficulty for the greater part of *year*. During this visit some of his eccentricities did not escape observation. For example, he rarely appeared at the family meals, preferring to dine in his own room at his own hour, not unfrequently turning night into day. His tastes were very simple, though a little troublesome; at least to the servant who prepared his repast. Coffee, boiled rice and milk, and a piece of mutton from the loin, were the materials that invariably formed his diet. The cook, who had an audience with him daily, received her instructions in silent awe, quite overpowered by his manner; for, had he been addressing a duchess, he could scarcely have spoken with more deference. He would couch his request in such terms as these: — "Owing to dyspepsia afflicting my system, and the possibility of any additional disarrangement of the stomach taking place, consequences incalculably distressing would arise, so much so indeed as to increase nervous irritation, and prevent me from attending to matters of overwhelming importance, if you do not remember to cut the mutton in a diagonal rather than in a longitudinal form." The cook — a Scotchwoman — had great reverence of Mr. De Quincey as a man of genius; but after one of these interviews, her patience was pretty well exhausted, and she would say, "Weel, I never heard the like o' that in a' my days; the bodie has an awfu' sicht o' words. If it had been my ain maister that was wanting his dinner, he would ha' ordered a hale tablefu' wi' little mair than a waff o' his haun, and here's a' this claver aboot a bit mutton nae bigger than a prin. Mr. De Quinshey would mak' a gran' preacher, though I'm thinking a hantle o' the folk wouldna ken what he was driving at." . . . But these little meals were not the only indulgences that, when not properly attended to, brought trouble to Mr. De Quincey. Regularity in doses of opium were even of greater consequence. An ounce of laudanum per diem prostrated animal life in the early part of the day. It was no unfrequent sight to find him in his room lying upon the rug in front of the fire, his head resting upon a book, with his arms crossed over his breast, plunged in profound slumber. For several hours he would lie in this state, until the effects of the torpor had passed away. The time when he was most brilliant was generally towards the early morning hours; and then, more than once, in order to show him off, my father arranged his supper parties so that, sitting till three or four in the morning, he brought Mr. De Quincey to that point at which in charm and power of conversation he was so truly wonderful.'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, *Christopher North*, II, 156.

If there is obvious exaggeration in this remembered sketch — e.g. De Quincey could not possibly have stayed under Wilson's roof for more than a few months — it probably has a kernel of truth in it.

## X

WE find no trace during the early months of 1829 of any communications with Blackwood in the carefully preserved records of that distinguished house; and no articles in *Maga*. The only products of De Quincey's pen were three papers on John Wilson in the short-lived *Edinburgh Gazette* for June and July. But about April 1 the financial stress had been temporarily broken by the £500 which he had obtained from the mortgage on The Nab. The family was soon reunited at Rydal; and in July De Quincey burst forth in that ebullience of joy with which he invited Knight to bathe in cream. Besides, when he returned to Westmorland, he found Wilson at Elleray eager to greet him and to plan excursions with him, more than usually cordial as the result of the articles still fresh in the *Edinburgh Gazette*.

'Your sketch of the Professor has given us pleasure at Elleray,' Wilson wrote to De Quincey. Then he went on to suggest points which might be included in following papers. 'If you think me a good private character, do say so; and if in my house there be one who sheds a quiet light, perhaps a beautiful niche may be given to that clear luminary. Base brutes have libelled my personal character. Coming from you, the truth told, without reference to their malignity, will make me and others more happy than any kind expression you may use regarding my genius or talents. . . . Do not fear to speak whatever you think less flattering, for the opinion of such a man, being formed in kindness and affection, will gratify me far beyond the most boundless panegyric from anybody else. . . . I am not so passionate in temper as you think. In comparison with yourself, I am the Prince of Peacefulness, for you are a nature of dreadful passions subdued by reason. I wish you would praise me as a lecturer on Moral Philosophy. That would do me good; and say that I am thoroughly logical and argumentative — for it is true; not a rhetorician, as fools

aver. . . . God bless you, my dear friend, and believe me ever yours affectionately, J. W.' <sup>20</sup>

De Quincey took some of the suggestions for the later articles. Certainly he referred, in order to refute them, to some of the charges upon Wilson's character; he gave a pleasant sketch of Mrs. Wilson. But he said almost nothing as to Wilson's virtues, his friendship and loyalty; there was certainly nothing as to his qualities as a philosopher and logician. Furthermore, he was directly critical; he pointed out Wilson's lack of independence of mind, his admiration of success, etc. Yet the whole bore the outward marks of the most candid geniality of feeling towards Wilson: so much so that one wonders whether De Quincey even remembered the dark suspicions of 1821. In any case, Wilson was delighted by the papers and took them at their face value.

# XI

MEANTIME, in spite of the absence of published work, De Quincey was not idle. He had larger game in mind than usual. The idea of a novel was still running in his head. On 14 January 1830 he wrote to Wilson:

My dear Wilson,

Thursday, Jany. 14, 1830.

You remember our innumerable contracts about the Novel. At length I am nearly in a condition to claim it, — that is, if you still think yourself bound by our old treaties. And the object of my present letter is to ascertain *that*. My MS. will be finished in less than a month at furthest, and it will bear the following Title: 'New Canterbury Tales' (i.e. on the model of Miss Lee's) 'by the author of the Confessions of an Eng. Op. Eater.' It is so prepared as to make a volume of 400 pages equal to Miss Lee's. Now for this can you give me 100 guineas? and in some shape immediately negociable? — Formerly you used to say that — on the same day on which I delivered the MS. — you would lay down the blunt. But say how far this holds at present in the year 1830. — Pray, spare me time for a single line of answer by return of post, if you possibly can.

I beg my best remembrances, and in the greatest hurry — to catch a messenger in this profound frost and snow (which drives everybody to the fireside) — I remain, my dear W.,

Yours affectionately,  
Thomas De Quincey.



Perhaps you will not take it unreasonable that if *par hazard* — more than 1000 or 1200 copies should sell — a fresh bargain shd. take place. But on this point say what you think fair. For we neither of us wish anything but that: and you are better master of the grounds for such a calculation than I.<sup>21</sup>

Blackwood, of course, was to be the publisher; but also, of course, the volume never appeared.

During the early months of 1830, he was taking some measures to secure a means of livelihood other than the pen. On January 31 he wrote to M. D. Hill: — 'Is the chair of Moral Philosophy still open at the London University? And if so, by what avenues to be approached?' And he followed this by a letter to Knight on February 19, asking the same question.<sup>22</sup> It is hard to fancy De Quincey as a Professor in a University; but he had the equipment of knowledge; and Wilson, whom he knew to be inferior to himself as philosopher and thinker, was a distinguished figure as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh. But either the replies from London were not encouraging, or his spirit of procrastination prevented further steps; for the idea is not again heard of.

*Blackwood's* was becoming more and more the only hope. But De Quincey had not yet fully recognized the fact. In that same letter to Hill of 31 January 1830 he had asked, 'Do you know of any literary work tolerably lucrative and fitted for me?' He was evidently in no way pledged to Blackwood; perhaps he looked with longing to the larger world of London; perhaps, more likely, he still hoped for some work which would enable him to live on in Westmorland, where he still had a cottage, and was the nominal owner of an estate. Even if he should write for *Maga*, he still seems to have hoped that he could remain among his beloved Lakes; and he was planning many articles. In a letter of March 3, to William Blackwood he gave a list of things he had in mind.

'My "Canterbury Tales" finished, I have several papers in a state of forwardness for "*Maga*," which I am inclined to think will suit you. In particular: —

1. One on the Flight of the Clamuck Tartars from Russia to the frontier of China. [Finally published in July 1837.]

<sup>21</sup> Bl. MSS.

<sup>22</sup> Catalogue of Francis Edwards, London, No. 464, October 1925.

2. One on the celebrated work (if a work so little known, and of which only two copies are said to survive, can properly be called so) of Giordano Bruno, called "Spaccio della Bestia Triomfante." A copy which occurred in an auction in Queen Anne's time, and drew public attention by the price which it fetched (viz., £50) is noted by Steele (as perhaps you may remember) in No. 389 of the "Spectator," but with great inaccuracy. I have Dr. Farmer's transcript of that copy which exists in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. I am also rich in other works of Giord. Bruno, bought at the Roxburgh sale in 1812, and have really read the books, which all the German historians of philosophy (Buhle, Termenon, and others) are compelled to sigh for as jewels unattainable even by princes. [He never published an article upon Bruno.]

3. A miscellaneous paper of remarkable literary notices, something of the nature of Ana, but more select than Ana usually are. [This was harking back to that series in *The London Magazine*, 'Notes from the Pocket Book of a late Opium Eater.' No such series ever appeared in *Maga*, or any other publication after this date.]

Further, I wish much to commence upon the Orators; and also, a thing I mentioned to Prof. Wilson, I have matter for a pointed article on the History of Logic, in connection with Whately's book. But for that purpose I should need two books — viz., Whateley's and Reid's "Anal. of the Organon of Aristotle" furnished originally to Lord Kames — for one part of his Sketches, and reprinted (as no doubt you remember) by one of our Fathers in the Row, Μακρόχειρ, I think — i.e. Longimanus, as Coleridge used to call him. On the whole, you may rely upon me during the next summer as a really active contributor.' <sup>23</sup>

## XII

HE had still other irons in the fire. He had already made some proposals to Lockhart in this early spring. Lockhart had replied with an obliging and very encouraging answer to his application, and had made a number of suggestions, among them, a book on the Lakes; for Lockhart was editorial advisor to Constable in regard to a series of popular volumes. On 10 March 1830, a week later than the letter to Blackwood just quoted, De Quincey replied to Lockhart:

'First, with regard to the *Lakes*, I am ashamed to say that I want much of the commonest knowledge called for in so

miscellaneous a subject. I am not an Ornithologist, nor an Ichthyologist (unless a dissertation on *Potted Char* would avail me, for that I could obtain) : I am no Botanist, no Mineralogist: as a Naturalist, in short, I am shamefully ignorant. And in this age of accuracy in that department, I doubt whether any less than a Humboldt or a Davy would satisfy the miscellaneous demands of this subject. By the way, I do not remember to have seen any scientific theme treated with so much grace and attraction of popularity, combined with so much original observation, as those of *Forest Trees* and the *Salmon Fisheries*, etc. by Sir Walter Scott; <sup>24</sup> and had I been within a thousand degrees so extensive an observer, or even extensive in the same degree as I myself am accurate, I would not have shrunk from the subject merely because I was not a regular *τετραπῶνος* school-built Naturalist. But my hatred of all science, excepting mathematics and its dependencies, is exquisite; and my ignorance in consequence, such as cannot be disguised.'

But there were other reasons; he would 'clash inevitably with both Wordsworth and Wilson' — Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* had already been through several editions; and Wilson was at work upon another guide, in three volumes; though as fate decreed never to be published. Wilson's work was likely to be of 'great variety' from 'the extraordinary activity of his mind, whenever he does not wilfully throw it asleep under the *sentimental*, which to my thinking is his evil genius.' Such rivalry De Quincey would not venture upon; and his only original contribution would be philological, the discovery set forth a dozen years earlier in *The Westmorland Gazette*, that 'the peculiar dialect of this country (more particularly of the district about Ullswater, etc.) is pure Danish.'

A second suggestion of Lockhart's had been a book on Oxford. Nor will that do. 'I will not trouble you,' De Quincey wrote, 'with the Pros and Cons. Suffice it, that until I come Southwards' — and he twice mentioned the probability of a visit to Lockhart in London shortly, which never came off — 'I have no materials.' Indeed, no subject involving any research was feasible 'where there are no great libraries.' He then went on to speak of a move not mentioned elsewhere.

<sup>24</sup> Here is an example of tact; for De Quincey's estimate of Scott usually was not of this high order; but he was writing to Scott's son-in-law.

‘For myself, as well on this account as for the benefit of my children with a view to ordinary accomplishments, either London or my old residence, Bath, is the mark I aim at within a year or so.’ Edinburgh was not yet a fixed and necessary refuge.

‘Meantime would not such a work as this which follows be useful to the Family Library — a digest, at most in three, at least in two volumes, of the “*Corpus Historiae Byzantinae*”; that is, a continuous narrative (woven out of the Byzantine Historians) of the fortunes of the Lower Empire from Constantine to its destruction? There has been, you know, of late an *expurgated* Gibbon; and, I believe, it has found favour with the public: but an *interpolated* Gibbon, or perhaps, more accurately speaking, an *integrated* Gibbon, I imagine to be more of a desideratum. And I think that Gibbon would have been of that opinion himself. However much of labour and research he bestowed upon particular parts of his subject, I do not believe he ever could have designed his work to be taken for a comprehensive body of Byzantine records, except under the one single aspect of its *Decline*. . . . Now then, I think that such [an integration] — long a favourite speculation of mine — might be accomplished even here, in the bosom of mountains, with no help [but that of] one of the two old editions (for I suppose it vain to wait for that better edition now issuing in Germany) of the Byzantine Historians, — Tillemont, Gibbon himself, a few books on the geography and on the Ceremonies and Dignities of the Byzantine Court with occasional aids as to such great collateral subjects as might cross one’s path in a course of so many centuries, Mahomet for instance, or the Crusaders. I am of opinion that considering how little the Byzantine Histt. have been read or translated, even in spite of Gibbon, the ground may be regarded as almost untreated.

‘Another plan of mine is — A History of the Crusades. I conceive that we have no decent one. Mill I read. In point of composition and philosophy he seemed to me very unsatisfactory. But that he is gone to Hades I should take the liberty of calling him a coxcomb. Old Fuller, however defective by relying on bad authorities, gives a far more rememberable portrait of the age and the romance. — However, here I am more at sea for the proper helps, some recent works having been brought forward, I think, in Spain. The other is my favourite project for the present. And I commend the project earnestly to your indulgent consideration. A readable — a popular book, I am satisfied that I could make it. And the accurate abstracts which I could manage to interweave, of dissertations upon the

Byzantine Aulic ritual, and concerning works that, generally speaking *do not let themselves be read* (to borrow a phrase from our German friends), might contribute to give it a permanent value, be the same little or much.<sup>25</sup>

This long letter shows again his fertility of plan at this period, and even more his methods of work and his ideals of compilation. It furthermore reveals in his references to very recent or forthcoming books in Germany and Spain how keenly, even in the remote fastnesses of bookless Westmorland, he kept *au courant* with scholarly publications. But the plans came to nothing, although Lockhart lent an encouraging ear. The story was, however, taken up in another very long letter to Lockhart, seventeen months later from Edinburgh, in the midst of the distressing financial straits of the year 1831. This letter was dated 17 August 1831, from 7 great King Street.

Again he proposed a 'Digest of the Byzantine Historians'; but now to begin at an earlier epoch; in fact, at the extinction of the Republic; for to narrow the subject too much would tend to diminish its popularity. At the time when he first suggested the work, the plan remained unfulfilled simply because engagements for periodical writing interfered from time to time to call off his attention. He went on: — 'However, I never lost sight of it; and have been continually reading and otherwise preparing myself in that direction: so that, whenever I put my materials together, they will make up a work in no respects hasty.' He was sore pressed for money, and he sought assurance that on 'say October 25, on presenting the MS. complete of one volume, I might count on receiving in some shape or other the payment which circumstances should then appear to warrant. The amount of this payment is a matter of much less anxiety to me than the time; . . . But *time* is a momentous consideration;' for that meant that he could pay his creditors, at least in part, on a date set. Then he added, 'Let not the earliness of the day startle you; I write 14 hours a day, when I once sit down to writing: and I may in fact say that much of my work is already done, though not exactly in a state for printing. . . . I am in a hideous di-

<sup>25</sup> Abbotsford MSS.; partly printed in Andrew Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, II. 46 f.

lemma; and on the brink of one much worse. But I can save myself by great exertion; and I wish to save myself only in that way. Everybody in these days, whether ranking with the rich or the poor, has in all probability his own difficulties: and in the uttermost extremities of mine I shall never think myself entitled to ask any friend to assist me further than by allowing to my own exertions the benefit of such an opening as he may have it in his power to offer. Even this species of assistance I know not that I am entitled to ask of you. But you are kind and indulgent in your constructions: you may have been used to consider me in the light of a friend; — and at all events I am disposed to believe that you will find a sufficient title to that particular kind of aid which I have requested of you — in the fact that you have it in your power to offer it, and that I on my part need it in the very highest degree.’<sup>26</sup>

The proposed Digest had become a desperate straw to clutch at. Lockhart’s reply is lost; but there is no reason to believe that he would not have acceded to the proposal. We hear no more of the scheme, although De Quincey’s concern with the dying Roman Empire evidently found expression later in the essays upon the Caesars. The reasons why he did not carry out his plan at this time are clear. He had no leisure to produce a book; the creditors were too close and pressing; short articles were more immediately rewarding.

<sup>26</sup> Abbotsford MSS.

## CHAPTER XVII

### EDINBURGH

1830-1837

#### I

THE GRIP of Edinburgh had definitely tightened by 18 June 1830, when De Quincey wrote to William Blackwood from Wilson's house, 6 Gloucester Place, where he was ensconced for the time.<sup>1</sup> He enclosed the corrected proof of the article on *Kant's Miscellaneous Works* (published in *Maga* in August); and he was hard at work on *Bentley* (published in the September and October issues); on *Medical Jurisprudence* (a subject constantly being proposed or mentioned for years, but never completed); on *Whately* (the article on *Whately's Logic* suggested in the letter of March 3, but eventually never written); *Demosthenes* (springing from his interest in the orators, but never written); and *Sadler* (presumably, Michael Sadler, also never written). Thus by 18 June 1830, he had already completed one paper for *Maga* and was looking forward to producing many others.

Financially the atmosphere was cheerful. De Quincey was expecting to contribute regularly. He was being paid at the rate of ten guineas per sheet, i.e. ten guineas for each 16 pages of the magazine. In a letter of June 18 we learn that £10 had already been advanced on an article; £5 15s. was to come. There was no pressure in the mention of the balance due; only a calculation indicative of careful reckoning. It was a note of easy thrift not to be heard again for years. Blackwood on his side was not hardened by pleas for money to be advanced on unfinished or promised articles, and he replied, not with the £5 15s. but with £6. He was glad that De Quincey was back and he was being generous.

<sup>1</sup> Bl. MSS. In a letter to W. B. on 31 January 1831, he refers definitely to a contract. This may have been already in effect in June 1830.

Throughout this chapter, references are to the Blackwood MSS. unless otherwise indicated.

## II

THEN in November De Quincey received an alarming letter from his wife and wrote off at once to William Blackwood: —

Sat. morn'g. Nov. 20, 5 o'clock. [1830]

My dear Sir,

I am conscious that I do not stand in a very favourable position for any request of any kind — as the writer of an article still unfinished; and I have but little time indeed to state the case; and lastly I am not sure that it will be of any use to me to succeed — under circumstances apparently so hopeless. But however, considering that any delay at this moment will bring two days more of delay (to-morrow being Sunday), and also having some wish to discharge *to the letter* a promise that I made some days ago — though holding out but little benefit to anybody, — I shall explain my situation briefly before I go for a few hours to bed. — Some days ago, (and to that circumstance almost entirely, in a very small degree to the sudden derangement of my plan by the Resignation of Ministers, you must ascribe my backwardness in my article)<sup>2</sup> I received a letter from my wife threatening suicide in the case of my not being able speedily to release her from her present situation. It is shocking to mention such a thing, but almost necessary in my circumstances; and of course I do it in confidence. — Now, if you inquire what there is distressing in her situation, I answer not much beyond what is purely imaginary. The main grievance I suppose to be this: the person at whose house she and her children have lodgings,<sup>3</sup> — a woman, and apparently coarse minded and vulgar, has children of her own. Disputes, such as naturally arise between children have occasionally, I suppose arisen. The mistress of the house has taken *part* as people of that rank (you know) always do, with her own children — wrong or right. My servants, on the other hand, have taken part with *my* children — no doubt also whether wrong or right. Hence ill-blood: and the woman, having no other means of expressing her spite, and no doubt suspecting that her arrear cannot be paid on demand (though in fact not much is due to *her*), has grown insolent — and perhaps has said things which make it painful to continue in her house: and unfortunately there happens to be no other in that neighbourhood where lodgings can be obtained; yet the neighbourhood cannot be left until *all* bills are paid. Such, according to my impression collected from very incoherent and passionate letters of

<sup>2</sup> This is the first allusion to an article on the current political situation.

<sup>3</sup> This would seem to be at or near Penrith — perhaps at Lingstube near Mrs. De Quincey's sister. This is, however, merely a guess.



my wife, is the extent of the evil from which she would escape by committing suicide. — To combat these views and intentions in her, I have for the 3 last days — Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday — precisely the three days on which my polit. art. claimed my undivided attention — been obliged to diminish the remaining time, so precious as it had become, by writing long and elaborate letters — arguing (or suggesting remedies upon) each particular grievance which she stated, and endeavouring to tranquilize her mind. By this direct abstraction of time, I have been thrown back greatly in my art. — and still more by the anxious and corroding thoughts, and suffering state of mind, under which I have written. Hence I have still not arrived at the close of my paper. Now, under a full persuasion that I *should* have reached that point by Friday night at furthest, I assured her in my letter of Tuesday and Wednesday that early on Sat. Mornng. I would call upon you — and state so much of the case as would obtain from you whatever the paper might seem to warrant. Not that any sum, which in any reason you could give for a better paper than this, would meet the demands of the case; but I promised myself that it would enable her to fence a little until I could write to my mother — which I resolved to do without delay as soon as my Maga duty was over. Meantime, by last night's post, I received a more distressing letter than ever, which I have felt myself obliged to show to Prof. W.. The threat of suicide is more determinately repeated; and she assures me peremptorily that, if I do not hold out some immediate prospect of relief in my promised letter of to-morrow night, her present application shall be the last letter she will ever write. In the frightful agitation of such an announcement, I would have written instantly to my mother: but unfortunately no answer could be had from Bath until some days after the time she fixes: and, as it happens that I owe my mother £100 (borrowed a few months back) which was to have been repaid this very month, I could not apply at this particular moment for a new loan without explaining the nature of my necessity at length. This therefore I defer till Sunday: and meantime in my letter of to-morrow night I shall briefly mention my intention and my certainty of receiving as much as she wants from that quarter within a week: and it would have been very agreeable to me if I could so far have kept my former promise as to send at the same time some small sum to meet the most pressing of her immediate occasions, though I am aware how small a one it is that an article can really merit which has been written in so hurried and distracted a way. In this manner I shall at least know that I have omitted nothing in my power.

At the same time, as I know how dreadful must be the pressure upon your anxieties in what regards Maga at this advanced period of the month, allow me to say that nothing but the very extraordinary and afflicting circumstances I have mentioned could have retarded me so much; and that, so far from yielding to a causeless despondency, had I not exerted the very greatest fortitude and control over myself, I could not have written at all. — If you ask me — Do I then place confidence in the sincerity of her threats? I answer that I do not know what may be the extent of her firmness: but I *do* know that she is under a most unhappy dejection of mind; that she is in a state of great nervous irritability; and that in something of the same condition of spirits at a very early period of her life she really did make an attempt of the kind she now threatens.

Believe me, my dear Sir,

Very faithfully and sincerely yours,

Thos. De Quincey.

I have been obliged to detain *part* of my MS.: I hope to be at work at eleven; and, if at 3 or  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 3 some messenger could come down, I will give him a part that at this moment when it is on the point of striking 6, I really cannot properly express from mere exhaustion.<sup>4</sup>

The letter tells its own story; but we may remember that Mrs. De Quincey was given to fits of melancholy; and even if she had not been, she must have had ample reasons for discouragement through all the years of poverty and loneliness, with her children often lacking the very necessities of life, usually in debt or living in uncertainty as to the future. Knowing De Quincey as we do, we may be certain that he gave her but fragmentary or highly coloured information as to his situation at any moment. Did she not admit to Dorothy Wordsworth in that letter of 1826 that she did not know the nature of the offers he had received in Edinburgh? The fact that she was a simple country woman with no experience of the larger world must have made her husband's movements the more mysterious. She must have been stalwart indeed if she had been able to escape moments of utter panic. On the other hand, one can not help sympathizing with De Quincey, devoted to his wife and family, and unfortunate in his struggle. The letter with all its distraction, made the more impressive

<sup>4</sup> Bl. MSS.; partly printed in Oliphant, I, 435.

by its formal restraint and deprecation, is manly. He asked Blackwood merely for what he earned; there were no appeals for gifts or loans to meet the situation.

This desperate threat of Margaret De Quincey finally brought to pass what Dorothy Wordsworth had urged four years before — the transference of the entire De Quincey family to Edinburgh. On 4 December 1830 De Quincey wrote to Blackwood, thanking him for his sympathetic response to the dreadful letter of November 20, and telling him that his family would soon be on the road to join him. 'I have to thank you greatly,' he wrote, 'for the very liberal manner in which you thought proper to over-pay my exertions on that occasion, and for the allowance which you made for the agitated state of feeling in which I was placed by sudden circumstances; more especially as you made this allowance at the very moment when you were suffering from the heavy anxieties and the pressure of extra expenses which my delay, however involuntary on my part, had caused. Such a state of things, it is satisfactory to know, never *can* recur; since by the 19th. or 20th. of December my family will be on the road to Edinburgh: and unless at a *distance* from Mrs. De Q. (as was the case at that time), I could not by possibility (even under the same circumstances in other respects) be liable to the same state of anxiety — the *only* shape which could materially impede my progress. . . . And in future . . . I can depend upon myself to say — that no irregularity as to time can or shall occur. As a lawyer provides for a fixed and unmistakable day in court-business, so I — once knowing the day from you — shall in future make a systematical provision to meet it.' <sup>5</sup>

The next duty for De Quincey was to find a house. He asked Blackwood (December 4) to obtain some information about furnished houses at Portobello. Yet it was not at Portobello that he first set up housekeeping; but at 7 Great King Street, a rather large and too expensive house in the new part of the town. Perhaps houses were scarce and he may have had to take what he could find; but it is more probable that his hopefulness of future prosperity led him to select a dwelling

<sup>5</sup> Bl. MSS.; also printed in part in Oliphant, I, 437.

beyond his means. He soon came to repent his choice, for he wrote to Lockhart some months later (17 August 1831): — 'You will observe that I date from a house of that class which implies a state of expenditure somewhat above the necessities of a needy man of letters. That I am hampered with such a house is one part of my misfortunes: and that part which I bear with the least firmness, as it happens to be the one in which I am not wholly without reasons of self-blame. In some degree it rose out of my embarrassments, which would not suffer me to clear off my arrears of rent until I had already dipped into a new term: and it gives me a pang of remorse — whenever I think with myself that perhaps a little more energy, possibly even an earlier application of the kind I am now making to yourself [namely, to write the Digest of Byzantine History], might have saved me from this evil.' From which we may gather that he took the house for a few months, but unable to pay the rent was forced to renew the lease as a means of deferring payment. Thus he stayed on for a time longer. All we know is that on 15 May 1832 his address changed to 1 Forres Street, where in turn he remained until 25 May 1833, when again he transferred his family, this time to Caroline Cottage, Duddington, near Portobello.

## III

TROUBLES never ceased wherever De Quincey was; debts sprang up about him like weeds in a garden. He had a large family; when it moved to Edinburgh there were besides De Quincey and his wife, seven children — an eighth was born in 1833. In a letter to Blackwood of 23 July 1832, and again on 8 February 1833 he said that he had twelve persons to support. His income was small. He received less than £20 a year from the remnant of his paternal property; his mother sent him £50 quarterly,<sup>6</sup> £25 from herself, £25 from Colonel Penson. All told the sum was inadequate for so large a household; and the necessary balance between income and needs had to be made up by De Quincey's pen. How much he earned can only be guessed; the amount must have been highly irregular. Now and then we have fairly definite fig-

<sup>6</sup> To William Blackwood, 1 February 1832.

ures for particular periods. Thus for example, from 15 May to October 18 1832 he wrote for Blackwood to the extent of £54 or £55. On that basis, he could rarely have received from his literary labours more than £100 a year at the outside. Such generalization is naturally hypothetical; but it is certainly above rather than below the actual earnings. It would have required careful household economy to live within that total — £310 a year; and with De Quincey's unwisdom in money matters, his constant straits are easily comprehensible.

The letters to one or another of the house of Blackwood during the next ten years are full of pathetic appeals, of desperate statements, of impossible situations. The court records of suits for debt, of Protests, of Hornings and Poindings, preserved in the Register House in Edinburgh; the records of Small Debts in the Sheriff's Office of Edinburgh; the records in the Bailie's court in Holyrood<sup>7</sup> — all tell of actions against De Quincey, and prove in cruel black and white that his fears of arrest, his endless disappearances and flights were caused by no imaginary creditors, as some writers upon De Quincey have been inclined to think, but by genuine and grim creditors who were only too ready to clap him into prison. That he actually escaped such indignity through so many years, is proof of his alertness and good fortune. He spent years in the Sanctuary of Holyrood; he fled to Glasgow; he hid in Edinburgh itself. His debts were real; his financial sufferings were not fictitious; and through them all he showed a hopefulness and a sort of courage entirely admirable.

The story of these troubles becomes monotonous; but it cannot be ignored, partly because the details have never been given before; partly because they play so large a part in his life for the next dozen years; partly, too, because these troublesome and external facts are almost all we know of him for a long period.

In January 1831, creditors were already at his heels; and on May 11 appeared the first court record — a 'Protest' by John Carfrae & Son against Thomas De Quincey for the non-payment of a bill for books of £37 16s. 6d. Presumably the debt was compounded for; for the protest was not followed by

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix I for a list of court actions.

other court action. Something was undoubtedly paid on the account, and a note was given for the remainder to be paid within a definite period. Such was the usual proceeding in De Quincey's case. But the single record of a suit in May certainly meant that a dozen creditors besides Carfrae closed in upon him with increasing pressure.

A year passed. On 1 February 1832, De Quincey wrote to his friend Sym Wilson, the banker, a brother of John Wilson, asking for the temporary loan of £30 to meet a note which he had given in part payment of a loan of £75 contracted in November and December 1829. 'My extremity is complete,' he said; 'for unless in 6 days of course I pay this bill, I am put to the horn, — and must go away where I shall have no means of making those exertions which hitherto, united with my other means, have kept me from ruin. — Utter ruin falls on me, if I cannot turn aside this bill.' \* Wilson probably lent the money; for De Quincey was not put to the horn.

## IV

To be 'put to the horn' — that is a phrase which needs explanation, especially as it will recur with painful frequency. It was a serious thing; and a curious process of Scottish law. First comes the 'Protest,' then the 'Horning,' then imprisonment for debt — or flight to sanctuary. Perhaps I can best explain the matter by quoting a paragraph from Scott's *Antiquary* in which Monkhouse elucidates:

'You suppose, now, a man's committed to prison because he cannot pay his debts? Quite otherwise; the truth is, the king is so good as to interfere at the request of the creditor, and to send the debtor his royal command to do him justice within a certain time — fifteen days or six as the case may be. [I.e. pay the debt.] Well, the man resists and disobeys — what follows? Why, that he be lawfully and rightfully declared a rebel to our gracious sovereign, whose command he has disobeyed, and that by three blasts of a horn at the market-place of Edinburgh, the metropolis of Scotland. And he is then legally imprisoned, not on account of any civil debt, but because of his ungrateful contempt of the royal mandate.' †

\* Scott-Moncrieff MSS.

† *The Antiquary*, Waverley Novels (London, 1895), II, 243. A more legal phrasing of *Horning* is this from *A Guide to the Public Records of Scotland*

Yes, he is legally imprisoned if he is caught; but he usually disappears into some hiding-place in Edinburgh or takes refuge in Sanctuary, i.e. in Holyrood.

The right of sanctuary is of immemorial antiquity; and Holyrood in the first half of the nineteenth century was the special legal refuge of 'notour bankrupts.' A man who had been 'horned' was *ipso facto* a declared bankrupt and liable to imprisonment; and the easy escape was to become one of the so called 'Abbey lairds.' Within the Abbey precincts they lived 'like rabbits in a warren,' crowded into small space. The boundaries of sanctuary over which the 'lairds' might wander unmolested might be extensive — the palace yard, King's Park, Arthur's Seat, Salisbury Crags, St. Ann's Yard, the ruins of St. Anthony's chapel, and other places embracing a range of between six and seven miles in circumference, including about half of the beautiful romantic lake of Duddington, and the surrounding hills and valleys to the strand at the foot of Canongate, or a little further west, the length of Holyrood; but a five minutes' saunter would take you past all the buildings in which the lairds were housed. Lockhart describes the precincts of the Palace itself and its melancholy garden as a 'variety of little miserable patchwork buildings, inhabited by a considerable population of gentry, who prefer a residence here to one in a jail.' Some of the buildings were certainly rickety, some fairly comfortable. Tiny taverns and lodgings to let abounded. And in a population which from the nature of the case must have been on the whole shabby, there were men of culture and even of intellectual distinction;

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*Deposited in H. M. General Register House, Edinburgh (1905):* — 'The person of a debtor could as a rule be attached only on the legal fiction that his failure to obey the order to pay or perform pronounced against him by a competent court, constituted an act of rebellion against the Crown, and accordingly on the application of the creditor, a precept, called Letters of Horning, was issued under the Royal Signet, by which, on the occurrence of such failure, he was publicly denounced by a messenger-at-arms as a rebel to the King with the usual blasts of a horn. The effects of this denunciation were the escheat of the whole moveable estate of the debtor to the Crown under burden of the creditor's claim, the transfer to his feudal superior of the life-rent escheat of his heritable estate, the accumulation of interest and principal as at the date of the denunciation, and finally, the liability of the debtor's person to imprisonment at the instance of the creditor until full payment and satisfaction were made.'

See Appendix II for copies of legal documents issued in Protest and in Horning in the case of *Beauchop vs. De Quincey* in 1837.

in 1827, Scott himself expected to join the company of unfortunates. De Quincey was there on and off for six or eight years.

Holyrood had its own independent government. The Bailie was appointed by the hereditary Keeper of the Palace, the Duke of Hamilton; and it was his duty to keep the community policed, to conduct local court, and to keep watch over his people like any mayor. The person seeking sanctuary was obliged, if he wished legal protection, to register with the Bailie at a cost of two guineas; and in return he received a 'protection' giving the 'benefit and privilege of the Sanctuary of Holyroodhouse.' But he must be circumspect. Debts incurred while in residence could be sued for in the Bailie's court; and he could be imprisoned for them, as in the outer world; and De Quincey's name often occurs in the Holyrood court records. On Sunday, however, from Saturday midnight to Sunday midnight, the debtors were free to go into the city of Edinburgh, to visit friends, to attend church, or otherwise to disport themselves, so long as they had crossed the line at the foot of Canongate on the return trip by the stroke of Sunday's midnight bell. Amusing stories are told of belated debtors being arrested by watchful bailiffs; De Quincey at least once because he was too late, had to remain in hiding in Edinburgh for a week — until the next Sunday — in order to get back safely.<sup>10</sup>

## V

IN July 1832, De Quincey must have £5 or be put to the horn; his water bill must be paid immediately, or the supply would be cut off. During the spring he had borrowed £110 from his sister and reduced his debts of £290, so that on July 23 they were but £128. Yet he was still 'dunned furiously' and was in hiding. 'Those creditors who have hitherto been de-

<sup>10</sup> The need for sanctuary gradually lessened until in 1880 imprisonment for debt was in most cases abolished. But retreat to the sanctuary remained long in certain cases one of the three essentials for constituting notour bankruptcy, and it was only when the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act of 1913 was passed that retreat to the sanctuary dropped out as one of these essentials. The classic authority upon this whole subject is Halkerston, *A Treatise on the History, Law, and Privileges of the Palace and Sanctuary of Holyroodhouse*, Edinburgh, 1831; but I have used freely the scholarly paper of Mr. Hugh Hannah, read before the Old Edinburgh Club, April 1927.



layed will be coming upon me; and the rest for their balance.' Furthermore, he was at an unusual disadvantage; for the £180 which his mother had advanced to pay off the back interest on the mortgage on The Nab was being subtracted from his quarterly allowance to the extent of 25% on each payment; and this debt to his mother would not be wiped out until January 1834. On August 3 a small debt was brought to protest; and on September 20 he was put to the horn for the same item. As a result of this he was again forced to leave home and to hide near by. 'It would be dangerous to me,' he wrote to William Blackwood, 'that any servant should know where I am; but my second son will bring any communication . . . left at Forres Street in 15 or 18 minutes at farthest.' And on October 29 he was actually arrested, but succeeded in purchasing his release 'by a composition.'

1833 was infinitely worse. On February 13 he had *no* credit at any shops. 'For the last 15 or 16 days, having a family of 12 persons absolutely dependent upon me, I have kept up with the demands upon me for mere daily necessities of warmth — light — food, etc., by daily sales of books at the rate of about 30s. for 1s. In that proportion have been my sacrifices; and I have now literally no more to sacrifice that could be saleable.' On April 24 he was 'at the last gasp.' On May 11 he was 'liable to arrest from various quarters.' On May 23 both Thomas and Margaret De Quincey were put to the horn at the instance of Mrs. Margaret Learmouth, of Parkhill, Stirlingshire, the owner of 1 Forres Street, for unpaid rent. The De Quinceys had taken the house at £80 a year, had lived in it for five quarters, and had paid £15 of the £100 due! How they escaped arrest, I do not know: but two days later, namely on May 25, the family removed from 1 Forres Street to Caroline Cottage, Duddington, near Portobello, just outside Edinburgh.

On July 2 De Quincey was sued again by John Carfrae & Son, booksellers, for £13 1s. 3d. On August 3 he was again sued, this time in the Small Debt Court, by one Muirhead. Again on August 14, he was driven from home 'suddenly in expectation of a process of arrest,' not to return until September 2; and even then 'the other Phillistines oblige me for

the present to deny my being in Edinburgh.' He even contemplated fleeing to London or Glasgow.<sup>11</sup> And yet again, on September 21, he was forced to leave home, 'under renewed and sudden expectation of arrest.' On September 27 he wrote that long and indignant letter to John Simpson in regard to affairs at The Nab which were agitating him in the midst of worries closer at hand. On October 14 Henry Gibson Duguid, teacher of music, brought to protest a bill for £17 for lessons given to the De Quincey daughters, a bill which a month later, on November 13, put De Quincey once more to the horn. And at last, to escape this threat of arrest, De Quincey fled to sanctuary in Holyrood; where on November 27 we find him living at Brotherstone's. This was his first visit to that famous refuge; but not the last.

The wearying chronicle continues. Safety from arrest in sanctuary paid no bills. On 27 February 1834, a bill of Crafrae's for £10 came to protest; and on April 10, De Quincey was once more put to the horn. And within Holyrood itself debts grew. On April 28 one Mary Ann Grant, a former servant, sued him for back wages of £1 12s. 6d. in the Bailie's court; while on June 30, one Mrs. Learmouth, grocer, sued him in the same court for £4 1s. 9d., a suit which recurred again and again in the records until far into October, even to the point of threatening warrants to 'open lock-fast doors' to seize books and papers. Meantime in the early spring De Quincey had returned for some weeks to Caroline Cottage, where he stayed into March; but on 19 May 1834, he was back in Holyrood, and had been living for several weeks at Miss Miller's, where his family later joined him at what were to be his and their headquarters until 1840.

## VI

DURING these three years of financial fears and worry, we know little of De Quincey's domestic and human side. Now

<sup>11</sup> In the essay on *Style* published in *Blackwood's Magazine* 1840-1 (*Works*, X, 150), De Quincey says, 'Some eight years ago we had occasion to look for lodgings in a newly-built suburb of London to the south of the Thames.' Taken literally, as Masson observes, this records a visit to London in 1832-3. More likely this portion of the essay was written in 1832 and refers to his being in London in 1825.

and then the letters mention that he had seen Wilson. He accepted at least one invitation to dine with William Blackwood. His health seems to have been fairly good. He was writing as hard and regularly as his duns would permit. On 27 February 1833 his youngest daughter, Emily, was born. In early September of the same year died his youngest son, Julius, at the age of three.<sup>12</sup> In the midst of fears of arrest, De Quincey's heart, so tender as regards young children, must have been sadly torn; and his grief can hardly have been lessened from the fact that he had to flee to cover immediately after the funeral; the creditor in the case 'having somehow ascertained from some person employed about my little boy's funeral that I was at home.' There is, however, one glimpse of the depth of his feeling in a fragmentary draft of a letter written a dozen years afterwards to his later friend, Professor Lushington.

'All children,' he wrote, 'become objects of a deeper tenderness, when it is remembered that a certain portion of them are always marked down in the unseen register as consecrated (dedicated) from their birth to an early death. Strong, or not strong, all are liable to *sudden* affections of the chest, or larynx. . . . It is therefore of vast importance to one's own peace of mind, that an existence so brief from a station of after review should have been *altogether* happy. . . . With respect to a little child of my own, whom we lost at three years old, I made a discovery — which but for the merest accident I never *should* have made — that *his* happiness had been greatly disturbed in a way that afflicted me much.' <sup>13</sup> The rest is lost; what the discovery was can never be known; but the feeling, the regret, was intense.

## VII

WE must now turn to literary concerns. On 31 January 1831, two articles for Blackwood had been rejected. De Quincey was hard pressed for money; yet his complaint was not because

<sup>12</sup> I have been unable to find where little Julius was buried. I think that there can be no doubt that he was buried in Edinburgh. The financial stress in September 1833 would have made any other arrangement impossible.

<sup>13</sup> BS. MSS. Most of the letter is printed by Japp, Page, I, 338; this passage is omitted.

of the rejections; but of the fact that Blackwood would not advance him money on promises. If Blackwood would only lend him something on future and better articles, he would be content. But the editor refused; and on that same day, De Quincey sent him another essay. Was it accepted? Four articles on *Samuel Parr* appeared in *Maga* in January, February, May, and June; and in March or early April De Quincey was at work upon the much proposed and never finished paper on Medical Jurisprudence. In March or April we have the first mention of a new novel, *Klosterheim*. 'I have also advancing to completion,' he wrote, 'my novel: and what I wish to know is — Does our former contract hold? If so, I shall present it to you "*in all April*," as the ship language has it; most probably between the 15th. and the 20th.' Again he was seeking expression in the novel form, largely because a novel completed would bring in a considerable sum of money.

On 12 July 1831 we have another mention of a 'Political Article'; but not the last. Throughout the years which follow, De Quincey was engaged to produce articles upon the current political situations in the British Isles and on the Continent. Here his long interest in the political field made him a useful commentator on Tory principles and on events seen through Tory eyes. For him these papers were a godsend; for a few newspapers and his great background of knowledge were sufficient to supply him with a half sheet of matter, returning an easily earned £5. But the trouble with such articles was that to be effective they must be written at the last moment, and often they were written too late to be included in the issue for which they were intended. His general output in 1831 was meagre; except for the Parr articles, and political papers, nothing. He was presumably at work on his novel *Klosterheim*, which was published as a separate volume in the next year.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In March 1832 *Klosterheim* went to the printer. When, however, the printers came to set the type they found a *lacuna* in the MS.; and William Blackwood wrote to say, 'The MS. was avowedly imperfect when I paid you for it, but I trusted implicitly to you as I do still, that you will make it as perfect as you can.' De Quincey replied, 'The explanation in sum is this: originally *Klost.* opened with a chapter describing the entrance of a body of Travellers, etc. after a battle. This arrangement was afterwards changed and the opening chap. being very elaborately written was laid aside to be introduced

## VIII

DE QUINCEY's desire to write fiction was a lifelong prepossession. Early, in the Diary of 1803, we have seen that he had had plans vaguely formed for novel writing; and his interest in the novel was shown by the course of reading which he pursued during that spring in Everton. In 1821 while he was still fresh in the success of the *Confessions* he had proposed to write a novel for Taylor and HESSY. In the late twenties he had suggested *The New Canterbury Tales* in the manner of Miss Lee to Wilson as a volume for Blackwood. *Klosterheim* was, however, his first completed and only published novel, one of the two separate volumes De Quincey put forth up to the time of the appearance of his *Collected Works*. But if he wrote but one novel, he published a considerable number of short tales.

As literature, all his attempts at fiction are for us merely curiosities. They are one and all conceived in the old-fashioned mode of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that mode which produced so many sentimental and mysterious narratives unreadable by our sophisticated age. His models were the romantic works of German writers, of whom Schiller and Tieck are the most famous; and the greater number of De Quincey's stories are merely translations and free adaptations. So persistent was his habit of

wherever the case might prescribe. I fully believed that this had been done. However, the chapter is certainly not in the MS. nor can it be found. I have therefore recomposed what is desired and rechaptered and revised the whole.' There seems later to have been some further trouble, some further need to consult the MS.; so that Blackwood asked to have it returned. De Quincey's reply throws some light upon his habits. 'Not being at all aware of any further use of the MS., I had before receiving your note this morn'g. burned (as I do all MSS. of articles) up to p. 83 inclusive. All the rest, if you wish it, I will of course preserve. But to prevent enormous accumulations of papers, I have constantly been in the habit of destroying every atom of MS.' And there is another note not without its significance as to De Quincey's attitude towards his novel as a work of art. 'I wish to know whether you would wish to have *Klosterheim* lengthened? To my great surprise, it makes only 299 pp. But if you wish it, I can throw in a chapter of 8-10, or 12 pp. which would carry it so far beyond 300 pp. - if you think that of importance.' Apparently Blackwood did; for the novel as it was published makes 305 pp. And so the little book appeared, a highly romantic tale, to make little stir in the world. It is a rare volume now; but it brought the harrassed author what he wanted more than fame, a substantial sum. We do not know what he received, but presumably it was the £100 which Wilson had agreed he should have for his earlier proposed *New Canterbury Tales*.

borrowing, that one may well suspect that even for *The Household Wreck*, *The Avenger*, and *Klosterheim*, which are generally accepted as of De Quincey's own invention, some obscure German originals may still be discovered.

Certain of his adaptations are extravagantly humorous, as, for example, *The Incognito, or Count Fitz-Hum*, and *Mr. Schnackenberger*. Others are full of the sentimental languor of *The Love Charm*. But the prevalent mood, especially in the 'original' tales, is that of mystery and terror. This is notably present in *The Avenger*, a story of that medieval period so dear to the Romantics, relating a story of revenge in which a community is thrown into consternation and held terror-stricken by a series of murders, while the murderer walks in its midst hidden and fateful. It is obviously intended to produce delightful thrills. One easily connects it with De Quincey's general interest in murders. Again, in *Klosterheim*, even though murders play but a subordinate part, we have terror. A Masque, named in the sub-title of the novel, moves through the book mysterious, and by melodramatic *coups de théâtre* brings back justice to the German principality which had been violated by an usurping tyrant. It suggests Poe's story of *The Red Death*; and if one is unconnected with the other, they both spring from some common inspiration. In *Klosterheim* as in *The Avenger* there is darkness, courtly pomp, the political corruption of petty princes, castles, mysterious appearances and disappearances; and, as with Mrs. Radcliffe, all the mysteries are eventually explained and justice is finally done.

A somewhat different tale is *The Household Wreck*, in which an ideally happy family, in an indeterminate environment, is brought to ruin by a false charge of theft against the lovely wife and by the consequent trial and punishment leading to death and destruction. It is a story set forth with clogging detail and analysis, so that the narrative moves sluggishly and induces impatience in a modern reader. Its terror lies not in external settings, but rather in a calamity which, springing from human villainy, sweeps without reason and without warning upon innocent victims. Two deaths and the ruin of the hero are the result; but the conclusion finds justifica-

tion in the repentance, too late to help his victims, of the villain.

The essential defect of De Quincey's tales lies in the unreality of the plots; but even so they might have been in some degree salvaged had there been reality of character. There is not, however, enough realism to bring any of the persons of the stories to life. The heroes are the conventional perfect gentlemen of noble sentiments, faithful love, and accomplished action; the heroines are sweet, loyal, and feminine; the villains are evil, tortuous, and astute. There is no life in them. Like all their kind, the tales were told merely to awaken emotions; and actuality was avoided with deliberate completeness. De Quincey succeeded in earning some money by these compositions, and they so far answered his purpose; but they made no impression upon his contemporaries.

When later he came to include such tales as he decided to reprint in his *Collected Works*, the great Victorian renaissance of fiction was well established; and some of his stories had been originally published after Dickens and Thackeray had become popular. But there are no signs that De Quincey appreciated the fact that the romantic stories of his youth were outmoded; nor is there any indication that he was alive to the new developments in the novel. Dickens he could only partly and feebly enjoy; Thackeray appealed to him not at all, so that when De Quincey was invited to meet him in Edinburgh he did not accept the invitation and he expressed no regret which carried conviction. He remained 'old-fashioned' to the end.

## IX

IN 1832, there was, apart from *Klosterheim*, but a small harvest of published work: — *Charlemagne*, and two of the six papers on the Caesars. In 1833 appeared three more of the papers on the Caesars, and one on the *Revolution in Greece* with an enormous footnote, equal to a second essay. This was not a large performance; and it is not easy to give any adequate reason for its meagreness, except on the general grounds of distractions due to lack of money or ill-health, or to both.

But there were many suggestions offered to William Blackwood of subjects for possible essays. In 1830 De Quincey had announced to the world that he might some time write a short exposition of the Transcendental Philosophy;<sup>15</sup> and 'some general review of the leading scholars since the restoration of letters, English and Continental.'<sup>16</sup> Both of these suggestions were tossed off at the moment without any sense of responsibility. But in his letters to Blackwood, he was ready to undertake other themes should they be approved — Goethe, Burke, Kant, again, the death of Sir Walter Scott, the death of Hannah More, ancient Orators, Demosthenes, Colquhoun's book on Animal Magnetism, The Two Noble Kinsmen. There is no unity in such a list extracted from the letters of 1831-4; and not a single item was written at the time. His mind proposed much; his will produced little.

## X

DE QUINCEY'S historical papers are mostly confined to classical periods, especially to those late and relatively little known centuries which he felt to be less hackneyed — the age of imperial Rome, for example. In this field are his long series of papers on the Caesars and his essay on the Philosophy of Roman History. But he was ready and able to dip into early Christian history in his discussion of the Essenes; to comment upon Charlemagne or to analyse the guilt of Anne Boleyn.

His mind in these papers works in two ways: — either using broad generalizations on philosophical lines, on the one hand; or indulging in discussion of particular points, on the other; points for the most part which he felt had been misunderstood or overlooked. In the large sweep of generalization, he allows his imagination full rein to fasten upon some great idea which he develops with all his eloquence, as, for example, in his *Philosophy of Roman History*, in which he develops the conception that Rome fell not through attacks from without by alien barbarians, but from decay within. The thesis is supported by wide learning drawn from his reading of classical history and literature and enriched by associative

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, VIII, 87.

<sup>16</sup> *Works*, IV, 225.



ideas and comparisons from his whole intellectual store. The first chapter of the *Caesars* is a noble illustration of his manner. Thus we have in these portions of his writings, the poet rather than the historian, producing literature of power rather than literature of knowledge; romantic in emotional tone, rather than realistic; illuminating through acuteness and suggestiveness, rather than scientific. But we must remember that he was writing for popular magazines and through them for the public, not for scholars.

But it is the other side of his historical papers that calls forth most amazement at his learning. Whatever the ultimate truth of his conclusions, as for example, that the *Essenes* *were* Christians and that Josephus was deliberately attempting to confuse his readers in his assertions that the *Essenes* were an old pre-Christian sect, the learning and ingenuity of his arguments show great 'parts.' All this sort of papers seeks to establish a truth by close and schematic argument; and if, as I believe, modern historians often disagree with him, his reasoning is keen and his scholarship is full. Ingenuity seems best to describe his method. Perhaps we may find in his interest in discovering new interpretations of facts or events something akin to his delight in the problems connected with murders. Certainly he prided himself upon his subtlety.

Another aspect of his historical papers is seen in his extraordinary use of analogies. While he is always emphasizing the uniqueness of every historical situation, in his fondness for the association of ideas and illustrations drawn from the whole range of human history, he is occasionally tempted to force his comparisons. This is notably true in his paper on Charlemagne, in which he elaborately sets the great Carolingian over against Napoleon in a way interesting enough but not entirely convincing.

Even in a brief comment upon De Quincey as historian, one must admit that in such papers as that on the *Essenes* and that upon Herodotus, he is sympathetic with the growing scientific methods of the history of his time, with its close examination of sources and its willingness to reevaluate and retest in a sceptical spirit earlier conclusions. Whatever his results his methods are contemporary. But I see few signs

that he was fully aware of the movement; and one might prove this unconsciousness by his very late plan proposed to Hogg of writing a new history of England in which Hogg was to write the narrative and he was to intersperse the pictorial comments; a history to supplant the works of Macaulay and Hume which he found wanting. But his objections to Macaulay arose, I suspect, rather from the Whiggish bias than from scientific inadequacy. Fundamentally, De Quincey with all his learning was hardly a scholar in the full modern sense; at least, his opportunities for exhaustive research were not used. His mind was encyclopedic; his sympathies were philosophic; but his concern was with popularizing. He had many essential elements of the great historian; but he certainly did not become one. The best of his papers take high place as literature, but as historical essays they made no impression upon the methods of history.

## XI

MEANTIME the relations of De Quincey and William Blackwood were not without friction. De Quincey was always writing notes, long or short, apologizing for being behind with manuscript or proofs; or asking for advances on unfinished articles. They got on Blackwood's nerves, and he said so. Sometime in 1831 De Quincey wrote to his publisher: — 'You misapprehend me in what I said of notes. I never could have any reason to complain of any neglect on *your* part: — What I meant was — that I understood you to have complained so heavily of *my* writing notes at all, that at last it became painful [to] me to write even on the most pressing occasions.' More than once Blackwood suggested, not too gently, that he wished fewer notes. De Quincey felt a lack of sympathy; but above all he felt that he was not earning as much as he needed. In July 1832 he was even driven to the possibility of leaving Blackwood entirely. In a long letter full of his concern over his prospects and of his relations with the Blackwood house, he wrote: — 'And upon the general case I have stated, I found also a general question — Whether, with my necessities as I have stated them, it will be of any use for me to stay in Edinburgh? — You will very much mis-

understand me, if you should suppose that I shall complain of your answer — *No*: or that I write in any spirit of complaint. I can readily believe that the demands upon you are enormous and incessant. Nor shall I feel the least vexation on being told that no more of my articles are or will be wanted. I shall regret only that I had not earlier known of this and in time to have reserved, from the last remittance I had, so much as would suffice to place me in London.' Blackwood had turned down some article; and De Quincey felt that he must count upon having five sheets per month, i.e., 80 pages of *Maga*, accepted! 'Dare I venture to anticipate that a body of MS. six times as great' — as he had sent in during the preceding month — 'could be welcome — no matter how objectionable its quality? . . . Perhaps, however, you may be willing to receive MS. up to a certain quantity. At any rate, in a matter of so much urgency and peril, I am sure that you on your part will not complain that I seek for certainty: nor if such a result should happen, that I have then first listened to old and repeated offers from London — when it became certain that my articles cd. not be taken by yourself in the extent required by my debts.'

On 2 October 1833 he was hard at work upon an unnamed paper which had run to the inordinate length of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  sheets; and he was planning to complete, Blackwood willing, the paper on Ancient Greek Oratory so long on the stocks. This was to be accompanied by specimens in translation; but as they 'require unusual polish coming from one expressly condemning the style of all former Translators, I fear I shall not have finished to my own mind before the end of the month.' Relations were, however, unusually pleasant with Blackwood at the moment; and happy at home in Caroline Cottage with his family, De Quincey added a paragraph of friendly comment upon the late numbers of *Maga* which Mr. Blackwood had sent him and for which he returned thanks. 'I and every member of my family read with concern that Tom Cringle has made his bow to the Public. I have no guess who he is: thus much only I think I have perceived — viz. that he is a Scotsman; but be he who or what he may be, I admire him greatly. In some of his sketches he has the mingled

power of Salvator Rosa and of Hogarth: so at least it strikes me.' But of the articles he proposed in the early part of the letter, not one appeared in *Maga*.

The second connexion with the house of Blackwood was drawing to a close. He was still writing for *Maga* in May 1834, and through the summer, although no article appeared. William Blackwood was ill, and grew steadily worse until his death on 16 September 1834. He had been a stern but not unkindly task-master; the old man had been on the whole considerate and sympathetic, especially in time of trouble; and De Quincey had a genuine respect for him. Now, at his death, his two sons took over the concern, and apparently sought to give it a more businesslike management; the father had been a strong individualist, and had run things with an uneven hand. Whether the tightening up of the new management of the Magazine was the cause of De Quincey's severing his connexion with it, is largely a matter of inference. But among the Blackwood MSS. is a communication written to De Quincey apparently soon after William Blackwood's death, which may well give a hint.

Robert Blackwood wrote to De Quincey:

My dear Sir,

I enclose £2 for you which is all I can give at present. I have no time to write more, but I shall take an early opportunity of explaining to you that my Brother and myself cannot submit to this continued demand for money on your part.

There is an old balance against you for which we have never made any demand nor are likely to do so until you are in more comfortable circumstances.<sup>17</sup> We must return to the rule which I deeply regret ever having departed from as I do not think our doing so has been of any service to you. That rule we shall in future adhere to — viz. that on receiving a *perfect* article from you — in 12 or at most 24 hours the value to be sent to you or the MSS. returned.

. I am, etc.  
R. B.

<sup>17</sup> Was this, perhaps, money advanced at the time of Mrs. De Quincey's threatened suicide, to enable De Quincey to bring his family to Edinburgh? If so, it was advanced out of generosity by William Blackwood and not because of De Quincey's begging. The 'demand for money' in this letter refers to requests for payment upon promised or unfinished papers.

That was businesslike and just, but not friendly. De Quincey's reply to this communication was apparently a refusal longer to contribute to *Blackwood's Magazine*. This is a guess, but a probable one. The fact remains that there are no further communications with the Blackwoods until 1837, so that for the next few years the Blackwood correspondence on which to base a narrative is cut off.

## XII

DE QUINCEY had been the while listening to other offers; one from London, as a letter to an unknown London editor testifies, a letter answering an indirect invitation to contribute, and proposing specifically a series of papers upon Kant and German philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Nothing came, however, of the negotiations; and he soon found the chance he was looking for in Edinburgh itself, in the newly established *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, a popular sheet of Whig or Liberal tendencies.

How he became attached to *Tait's* we have no means of knowing. But in 1833 he contributed two articles, one on Kant's essay *On the Age of the Earth*, and one on *Hannah More*, a subject which he had earlier proposed to Blackwood. In February 1834 he began in *Tait's Magazine* that series entitled *Sketches of Men and Manners from the Autobiography of an English Opium Eater* in twelve chapters; and, also, three papers on Coleridge. For the next three years he wrote entirely for *Tait*.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Brit. Mus. MSS. Addit. 37,021 N; printed by W. E. A. Axon in the *Manchester Guardian* of Tuesday, 30 October 1906.

<sup>19</sup> While almost the entire correspondence with Tait has been lost, we can gather that the personal relations between Tait and De Quincey were never close. Yet Tait seems to have been an interesting man. He was born in 1792, the son of a builder who left him a large property. In 1832 he established *Tait's Magazine*, sold at first for 2s. 6d., and later reduced to 1s. In it he gave many obscure young writers an opportunity to publish. He was an independent radical in politics, very friendly to the Whig party. He was courageous. He seconded the nomination of Macaulay when the radicals and Tories combined to defeat him. He was a man of culture and an excellent pianist. In 1848 he bought the delightful house, Prior Bank, Melrose; he also maintained a house on Walker Street, Edinburgh. He died in 1864. His sister married Adam Black, the publisher. (Obituary notice in *The Scotsman*, 5 October 1864.)

## XIII

IN these papers he returned for the first time since the *Confessions* to personal reminiscences; but whereas in the *Confessions* he drew upon his memories to evoke the cause for the effect, namely, his dreams, here he is writing of his past as a direct subject for literary narrative. To be sure, his method is the same; the imaginative heightening, the artistic 'composition.' But because of the lack of sequence leading to momentous issues, the papers miss the tension, the superb sweep of the *Confessions*. They are merely autobiographic sketches, articles done in a lower key. They are not the less delightful, however, in a simpler way; and if in the original series before they were revised for his collected works they lack sustained power, they contain some of the most charming prose which De Quincey ever wrote. They have surprising freshness, especially when read in the light of the grim background of the years 1833-4. This may be partly accounted for by his having rediscovered a mine of literary expression and the freedom of movement possible in dealing with his personal past.

The papers are as unegotistic as autobiographic narrative can be; detached and candid. In 1850 he wrote a letter to Hogg bearing upon a similar biographic paper. 'I do not offer this sketch as deriving any part of what interest it may have from myself, as the person concerned in it. If the particular experience selected is really interesting, in virtue of its own circumstances, then it matters not to *whom* it happened. Suppose that a man should record a perilous journey, it will be no fair inference that he records it as a journey performed by himself. Most sincerely he may be able to say he records it not for that relation to himself, but in *spite* of that relation. . . . That is *my* case. Let the reader abstract from *me* as a person that by accident, or in partial sense, may have been previously known to himself. Let him read the sketch as belonging to one who wished to be profoundly anonymous. I offer it, not as owing anything to its connection with a particular individual, but as likely to be amusing separately for itself; and if I make any mistake in

*that*, it is, not a mistake of vanity, exaggerating the consequence of what relates to my own childhood, but a simple mistake of the judgment as to the power of amusement that may attach to a particular succession of reminiscences.' <sup>20</sup>

Different as these papers are from the *Confessions*, they serve, in considerable part, as notes upon it, necessary to be read as introduction or appendix to that greater work. Had they not appeared in a somewhat obscure Edinburgh periodical, they would doubtless have brought more immediate reactions from the contemporary public.

In the papers on Coleridge, and in later papers upon his quondam friends, the interest springs not merely from De Quincey's personal past but from his associations with some of the great literary figures of his time with whom he had had close intercourse. Coleridge had died in August 1834, and the four articles upon him appeared in the September, October, November, and January numbers of *Tait's* following his death. In 1833 De Quincey had written a similar article upon Hannah More who had also recently died; but he had known her only slightly. Now, however, he was writing of a man with whom he had had intimate associations as a friend for many years; and by necessary consequence, he was easily led to write of other former friends still living, notably, the Wordsworths, Southey, Mrs. Coleridge, etc. It was not an unusual thing to use one's friends as subjects for essays; and no objections would have been raised had the papers been sufficiently laudatory and generalized. But De Quincey seemed ingenuously unaware of, or coolly indifferent to, the possible feelings of his erstwhile friends; he set down his memories and opinions with unvarnished candour, praising and condemning as he felt.

Unfortunately, the Wordsworths, Southey, the Coleridge family were particularly sensitive to any domestic publicity, and regarded as treasonable any revelations by an old intimate. Such sensitiveness is entirely understandable; especially, as the age was busy producing and maintaining a series of heroic portraits of its great men, as countless Victorian biographies testify. Reticence as to personalities was becom-

<sup>20</sup> Page, II, 12; letter of 21 September 1850.

ing axiomatic. If the old Latin maxim, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, was sound, even more true was it of the living. Thus when De Quincey pointed out Coleridge's mysterious plagiarisms, his domestic infelicities, his weaknesses, there was inevitable offence. And the fact that much which De Quincey wrote was common knowledge among the Coleridge circle, and that it was impossible to refute it directly, made the matter worse. Southey at least was driven to violent utterance; De Quincey deserved a whipping; and the others felt deeply De Quincey's ingratitude.

As for De Quincey, he was detached in mind, and wrote of the group as if he were discussing men of an age long dead. He had known and admired almost to idolatry the works of those of whom he was writing. Coleridge and Wordsworth still remained his literary gods. But he had found them human; and his critical, his analytical mind, dissected and balanced everything that came within its sweep. When he wrote of friends, he did not, or could not, change his methods. He gave away no secrets; his praise out-topped his blame; but he qualified, explained, weighed, and deplored. And we who read in later days, can only rejoice that he lacked 'tact.' Indeed, he has not diminished the size of his idols; but rather he has increased their fame by brilliant insight, discriminating judgment, and unforgettable pictures of the living men which might have been permanently lost in the vague adulations of a Christopher Wordsworth or a younger Southey.

On the other hand, the question of De Quincey's accuracy, or even veracity, needs a word. He was a literary artist rather than a reporter. If Thomas Poole asserted that his conversation with De Quincey concerning the Pythagorean saying anent beans was made up out of whole cloth; if, as Dykes Campbell maintains, it is unlikely that Coleridge confessed his opium excesses to the young stranger on their first meeting; the fact is that Coleridge *did* borrow without acknowledgment, and deny it;<sup>21</sup> and that he *was* a slave to opium. Essentially the portraits are true as any great portrait is true. The charge that De Quincey was biassed is not perhaps so

<sup>21</sup> The Coleridge family answered this attack in Sara Coleridge's long introduction to her father's *Biographia Literaria*.



easily answered. I feel that he was not deliberately so. He took a certain, perhaps unconscious, delight in recurring to Coleridge's weaknesses. His claim that Coleridge took opium out of sheer desire of sensual pleasure is, in the light of further knowledge, largely false. But De Quincey had an inherent satisfaction in proving himself superior to his friend in opium eating. And again and again there seems to be a latent jealousy at seeing Coleridge cared for by friends while he himself was forced to face the bitterest misfortunes of life single-handed and unaided; and he could never forget the attitude of the whole group towards his wife. As for Wordsworth, he found much that was not sympathetic in his character and became critical. The portraits need to be taken with qualifications; they are somewhat prejudiced. Yet his subjects are painted through personality. They are what *he* saw; just as a portrait by Titian or Velasquez is the truth as the artist saw it, and precious in consequence.

It is fair to add, however, that De Quincey after the event was not entirely insensitive to what the friends and relatives of his subjects might feel. In a letter to Robert Blackwood on 30 August 1840, he deplored the fact that a quarrel with Tait after the original manuscripts had been handed in had made it impossible to revise the papers in order to soften some of the things which he had written in the heat of composition, and which in the light of reflection he wished to change. He was evidently disturbed at the storm of feelings which had been aroused by earlier papers, and he would not willingly give pain. Furthermore in the revision of these articles in *Tait's Magazine* for his collected works, he not only improved their literary quality but also omitted some incidents, notably an irrelevant and painful anecdote reflecting upon Mrs. Coleridge's attitude towards Mrs. De Quincey — incidents which were especially offensive.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> De Quincey would seem to have felt that he had done nothing offensive to Wordsworth, at least, in publishing his papers upon him in *Tait's*, since in 1848 he wrote a letter of introduction to Wordsworth for a Mr. Moussabines. In the note there is no sign of apology; and no sense of the disapproval of the Wordsworth family. (Page, I, 352.)

## XIV

ON 25 May 1835 — two days after De Quincey and Margaret had been put to the horn by Mrs. Learmouth for non-payment of rent for 1 Forres Street — the family took possession of Caroline Cottage in Duddington, near Portobello, out of the reek of the city, and yet within easy walking distance; and far from creditors who were too neighbourly in Edinburgh itself. One can only wonder that the agents of Lady Nairne who owned the cottage were ready to let the house to so poor a 'risk.' But they were; and the family found itself in a comfortable and attractive dwelling. The present house is considerably changed from what it was in 1833; but one can still trace the old form. After the confinement of Edinburgh, the country space and freedom must have seemed a very heaven to the family used to the openness of Rydal and Grasmere; and whether by accident or by design, the house backed up to the region free to the Abbey Lairds, so that De Quincey could easily escape from the house to within bounds if necessary, and could approach almost to his own door within the very bounds themselves.

Of his life in Caroline Cottage we know practically nothing. There is one mysterious incident which took place during the period of his living there. Mrs. Rawnsley, of Allan Bank, owns a small undated note, presumably addressed to Tait for whom De Quincey was writing at the time, suggestive of much, but baffling. 'I have had a little child,' De Quincey wrote, 'detained from me by violence at Portobello, which I mention, because it has interrupted my writing, having involved me in application to the Sheriff etc. for 4 days — and in other measures. I am driven hard by the rewards etc. necessarily promised in this case.' And he asked for the loan of 30s. to be repaid by the second part of a paper. That is all. How the incident happened, we can hardly guess. It was evidently a harrowing experience. Could a creditor have been driven to abduction?

During the summer of 1833, his sister-in-law Ann Simpson was visiting the family, and about October 1, after the mortgage on The Nab was foreclosed and the estate was sold, ap-

parently John Simpson joined them; and there was controversy over the payment of the rent; but that was to be expected.<sup>23</sup>

## XV

THE year 1835 was memorable for perhaps the most bitter blow that ever befell De Quincey — the death of his eldest son, William. Of the circumstances we know little except that William died of hydrocephalus — the same disease that had killed De Quincey's little sister Elizabeth more than forty years before.<sup>24</sup> Of the father's hope for the brilliant future of the boy and of his grief we have touching testimony. Dr. Japp quotes a passage from an introduction to *Letters from a Modern Author to his Daughters on the Useful Limits of Literature considered as a Study for Females*, which exists, or existed, in a manuscript which I have not seen. It was written some time after William's death to the end of pointing the moral of fortitude as exemplified by his own demeanour. It is moving, none the less.

'You have been in some measure a witness to the fortitude with which I have borne these later calamities,' — he was addressing his daughters directly, and was including the death of his wife among the calamities, a loss which occurred in August 1837. — 'True it is that we, who see most of each other, nearest relations united in the same household, see but little of that inner world, that world of secret self-consciousness, in which each of us lives a second life apart and with himself alone, collateral to his other life, or life which he lives in common with others. That is a world in which every man, the very meanest, is a solitary presence, and cannot admit the fellowship even of that one amongst all his fellow-creatures whom he loves the most and perhaps regards as his other self. But allowing for this impossibility of following me into these secret haunts of feeling — privileged recesses for all human beings alike — you have in other respects seen the silence and tranquillity with which I have supported losses the heaviest by which I could have been assailed — wounds applied, as if with premeditating

<sup>23</sup> For correspondence in regard to the rent of Caroline Cottage, see an article by Mr. Forbes Gray, in *Chambers Journal*, March 1926; and also *Modern Language Notes*, May 1933.

<sup>24</sup> In *The Afflictions of Childhood*, original form, he wrote. 'Long after this, I saw a similar case: I surveyed the corpse (it was that of a beautiful boy, eighteen years old, who had died of the same complaint).'

skill, exactly to those points in which chiefly I was vulnerable. I will trust myself to notice particularly only one case. Your eldest brother, my first born child, the crown and glory of my life, died nearly upon his eighteenth birthday. Upon him I had exhausted all that care and hourly companionship could do to the culture of an intellect, in all stages of his life, somewhat premature.<sup>25</sup> And the result was such, so far beyond what I had even hoped for, that I was advised (and at one time I entertained the advice) to publish a little memorial account of him and his accomplishments. In this I could at least have shown, in proof of his classical attainments, not only an Etonian skill in the management of Greek metres, but, in one instance at least, in a commentary which he had composed at sixteen upon Suetonius, that he had dealt successfully with some difficulties that had baffled both Casaubon and Joseph Scaliger. Some of these, indeed, I shall yet take an opportunity of publishing; not so much by way of trophy to him, as for the real light they bring to the text of that author. But from the scheme of a memoir my heart retreated under the hopelessness that I could raise any echo to the feelings which moved there by the faint exhibition of a few glittering accomplishments — accomplishments possessed in common with many of every generation for the last two centuries, who, each in his turn, has been honoured by tributes which brightened their memories with some fugitive effect, have had their names murmured over with a sound continually decaying through a few brief months, and then have all alike sunk into everlasting silence and forgetfulness. Such records are tolerated out of pity for the anguish of wounds yet raw and bleeding; but rarely do they gather in their train any genuine accompaniments of sympathy: nor is praise, after all, and the language of honour, any balm to real sorrow: love only, the love which feels a loss, and not *for* a loss, is the one sole consolation which penetrates to the heart of those who weep in secret for the vanished faces of their household.

‘Under this loss, which (as I have said) cut away from me the very glory of my life, you can bear me witness that I have not otherwise shown any alteration in habits of feeling than by study and literary labours far more intense. I believe that in the course of any one month since that unhappy day I have put forth more effort in the way of thought, of research, and of composition, than in any five months together selected from my previous life. Thus at least (if no other good end has been at-

<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Carlyle said, ‘A boy of the English Opium Eater told me once he would begin Greek presently; but his father wished him to learn it through the medium of Latin and he was not entered in Latin yet because his father wished to teach him from a grammar of his own which he had not yet begun to write.’ (Hill, *Talks upon Autographs*, p. 99.)

tained) I have been able to instruct my surviving children in the knowledge that grief may be supported, and how it may be supported. Energy of thought, and the determinate application of the mind to themes able to absorb its entire capacity of feeling — these, with a spirit of un murmuring resignation, are equal to the task of suspending daily for hours, turning aside, and charming into slumber, the most heart-gnawing affliction.’<sup>26</sup>

If William was De Quincey’s chief pride and hope, yet none the less was he devoted to all his children. His daughter Florence gives a picture of these dark Edinburgh days as she recalls her childhood. She was born in 1827, and her memories began soon after 1830. I can only use her own words.

‘My own first awaking to the fact that I had a father grew out of the restless nights of a delicate childhood, when my small, ill-regulated uproar was sure to bring the kind, careful arms which rescued the urchin from a weariful bed and the wisdom of nursery discipline, and brought it to the bright warm room, and the dignity and delight of “sitting up with papa.” This papa, after a petting and soothing process of inexpressible sweetness, and coffee well loaded with sugar, had always some delightful book, exquisite to the sense of smell, as a book always was to the family nose, and to the eyes, because of pictures, about which, when they became too amazing for the restraining sense that “papa must not be disturbed” he had always something wonderful or beautiful to tell. The leaves of this book had generally to be cut, and much breathless joy came of the careful teaching how this was to be done, so that there might be no ragged edges; reverence for the person of a book being among our early lessons. The triumph of the small operator and the applause of the audience over a well executed work was the chorus of each opened page. In my memory there seems an unending supply of these books; but perhaps really little was done, as the little creature fell asleep sooner than was its heroic intent, which was to “sit up *all* night with papa.”

‘As a girl between ten and twelve, I was his constant and almost only companion,’ — this was after her mother’s death — ‘and was never so happy as with him. The unfailing gentleness of his temper and tender attention to the feeblest girlish

<sup>26</sup> Page, I, 304 ff. There is evidence that De Quincey tutored others of his children as well, and that he believed himself an effective teacher. But his youngest daughter bears evidence that he worked most with William. ‘I believe my father taught him himself, and being a young man was more energetic in his instruction’ . . . than in the case of the younger sons. (MS. letter to J. R. Findlay, 18 January 1877.)

thoughts and interests, the unconscious ways to both of us in which he turned these into high meanings, without overshooting the power of the child, was one of those wonderful and gracious gifts, like his power of conversation.' <sup>27</sup>

Again, Mrs. Bairdsmith recalls a pretty memory of her father which must be referred to the time when the family was living in Caroline Cottage, namely, to 1834. The baby was born early in 1833. 'One of my memories of him in bright summer mornings was his capturing my baby sister, fresh from her bath . . . and dancing her about the garden, the child with its scanty white raiment and golden head, looking like a butterfly glowing among the trees.' <sup>28</sup>

#### XVI

LATE in July 1835, occurred the death of his uncle, Colonel Penson. He died at Cheltenham where he had been living for some years apart from his sister, with the widow of Thomas's brother Henry. His death, I am afraid, De Quincey had looked forward to with some hope as a possible relief from pressing debts, in the assurance that his uncle would certainly leave him a considerable sum of money. But while his uncle was mindful of him in his will, the immediate funds made available to meet Thomas's difficulties were from his point of view disappointing. <sup>29</sup>

The will of Colonel Penson, proved on August 1 and again on 16 December 1835, is still preserved at Somerset House in London, an elaborate and much be-codiciled document. In it he tied up his property in various ways so that the immediate results for De Quincey were small, apart from an annuity

<sup>27</sup> Page, I, 359 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Page, I, 360.

<sup>29</sup> Curiously enough, De Quincey's bitterness fell upon his mother; perhaps not at once; but certainly in 1838 or 1839. In a fragmentary draft for a letter is a passage which indicates this. 'Not only,' he writes, 'has she absorbed 2/3rds. of my father's fortune, but has intercepted the whole of a second, and almost the whole of a 3rd. (my uncle's). All these it is true come eventually by their larger proportion, to myself. But according to all appearances I shall drop out of the series of generations, as scarcely if at all surviving my mother; and my claims will first revive effectually in my children. Now, if all men had mothers living to ages so excessive and mothers by strange coincidence of accident absorbing one estate after another, who would escape embarrassment?' Words with a touch of humour in them no doubt, but not without hardness. (BS. MSS.)

of £100 a year, and *that* he had already been receiving as an annual gift. But more interesting than the will itself, is a long letter from Mrs. Quincey.

Weston Lea, July 30, 1835.

My dear Son,

We are now about to send off the Chest containing your Uncle's Wardrobe, plate, and household linen, devised to you. I should now only be rejoicing to think of its comfort to you all, but I must now append to this announcement some uneasy thoughts which are busy to disturb my complacency, for I cannot help recollecting that when, in a time past, you were contriving one of your migrations, you spoke of selling your Goods and Chattels as an agreeable expedient! Now, as I may truly say we have not kept to the amount *named* in the will, in plate and linen, and have sent the Chest fuller and closer packed than it was received, it would add to my bitter regrets, both to think of my folly and your scorn, of our goodwill in the surrender of our rights and your disrespect to your Uncle's memory; and I need hardly add you would sell for a small sum, plated things for nothing, what you could not buy for a large one. . . .

But I must now enter on some very painful subjects: 1st. I have heard and noticed before, though you replied not, that you are still an Opium-Eater, and this dreadful Drug, as it is its nature to ruin the unhappy recipient, thus acts on you, destroying alike the will and the power to discharge all bounden duties, to the full extent which the more common forms of intoxication effect! Well, with all you wrote *so well* before me, of poor Coleridge's dying opium misery, I am lost in the saddest wonder, and what I have further to say, however grievous, can be no wonder at all. That you write, in a disreputable Magazine [Tait's], on subjects and in a spirit afflicting, as I hear too, to your real friends, I suppose may be accounted for in this way, that to the last moment of opium delirium, you will not write where you might with honor and no compromise of your professed principles; " — *Tait's Magazine* was radical; De Quincey was a Conservative — " money being spent, and no choice left, you take up with Mr. Tait! Another report I rejected as quite incredible, namely that your Children's education is neglected: but how shall I mention the corroborating fact, that in dear Margaret's short letter no less than seven false spellings of very common words appear. I blame not the poor child but you, and you only, my son. I did not make this discovery without grief, I assure you, to think that you are content to leave your Daughters thus without a decent knowledge of mother English, and

to fill up their own minds as they please, this is indeed a cruel violation of the 'rights of Daughters' . . . but I am so touched with your Children's misfortune, that I am ready to help them: their Mother and Grandmother stood among a neglected, ignorant race, but your children must stand alone to be pointed at, but this shall not be if I may be permitted.

I therefore propose that you shall procure and enforce the instruction which I will pay for; but observe, I must and will only pay the School Bills, or if, as is here the case, a day Governess is to be had who gives a certain set time, which the Pupils are diligently to work upon, so as to produce the expected results to the Teacher the next day. I mention this mode, if to be had, as the best; but you may conclude that this is an object close upon my best affections, and for nothing else will I advance the money.<sup>30</sup>

So if De Quincey was not immediately and directly benefited by the will — except for the gift of plate and household linen — he was indirectly by an allowance for the education of his daughters. Even though his mother would be pained if he should sell the plate, he was soon forced to do so; and now that the annuity was his by legal right, he proceeded to sell it for immediate cash! Many of the letters which have been preserved during 1836 are concerned with the negotiations.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, much of the evidence of this and the fol-

<sup>30</sup> BS. MSS.; partly printed in *Memls.*, II, 171 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Thus for example on 6 January 1836 he writes to his solicitor, J. J. Smith, a very strenuous note. Smith has written to the chief executor of Colonel Penson's will asking if he will sanction the transaction. But De Quincey is certain that Parsons will answer neither *yes* nor *no*, will not wish to be a party to it, and will seek 'time for sending round the affair to my mother by such channels as are open to him and his brother trustee. That object, once accomplished, all is ruined.' And he goes on, 'My mother has great power of a pecuniary nature: it is as certain as day and night that she will avail herself of this power, without the loss of one single post, to exact such promises from me as would effectually fetter my taking one step in this direction for the rest of her life. She would instantly place me in this dilemma: Either to renounce upon my honor all attempts to effect a loan of this nature, or on the other hand with my eyes open to renounce my present interest in whatever is *at her own disposal*. It is true — and much of her fortune is *not* at her own disposal; but a good deal *is*. . . . If Mr. Parson is allowed time for writing to you and receiving your answer, my mother's interference will have taken place before the transaction can be completed. Coming *after* the completion, her protest will be of no bad effect in any way: coming *before*, that same protest will be fatal.' (MS. in my possession.)

On 11 January 1836, De Quincey writes again to J. J. Smith. We learn that Smith will act as security to the extent required by the Caledonian Insurance Company which is to advance the loan, and De Quincey is grateful to him; he adds, 'Professor Wilson is my oldest friend in Edinburgh now



lowing years is full of desperate financial worries which are tedious to recount and which may best be relegated to the notes.<sup>22</sup>

living: Sir William Hamilton and a brother of Prof. W. my next oldest: all of 20 years' standing and upwards. To all of these gentlemen there is a powerful objection: one *would* not give the security required: at least, I think so: two *could* not: they would not be accepted by the Insurance Co.' (viz. J. W. and Sir Wm. H.). (MS. in my possession.)

What is he to do with the money? On 16 January 1836, he again writes Smith: — 'For what else am I borrowing this money than expressly to *pay these creditors?* All will receive 50 per cent. and at present all are . . . so favourably disposed . . . all will most gladly take this sum together with the assurances I shall be able to give for a second payment to the same amount in February, 1837; at which time I receive a considerable sum from another quarter.' From what I do not know. (Letter for sale by Maggs, 1911.)

But on February 19, the Insurance Company was holding off; and we find a letter of the same excitability. 'The Insurance Company are trifling with us. That is clear. To have invited us to resume the transaction — was in effect (according to all equity, all common sense, and (as I doubt not it will be found) all *law* whether English or Scottish) was, I repeat, in effect and meaning to renounce their former scruples. This invitation demanded an answer from us: that answer we gave on Tuesday morning last, Feb. 16, and what followed? The Company (it now appears) want time to consider their answer to us — Answer! 'What answer? Answer to what? Did *we* put any question? Yes. When and where?' (Maggs, 1911.)

On 20 June 1836, he finally secured a loan of £950.

A year later, on 6 June 1837, he was again trying desperately to raise more money, another loan from the Caledonian Insurance Company upon the reversionary interest of other portions of his Uncle's property due to come to him upon his mother's death.

<sup>22</sup> Among the evidence is a 'pass-book' of Miss Miller (Masson MSS.) giving detailed records of De Quincey's accounts with her from 3 May 1836 to 14 August 1840, when his family left her lodgings. Its interest lies in the fact that we can follow the growth of a debt. Beginning with the small sum of £2/3, small considering that De Quincey had apparently been living under her roof for two years, the amounts owed varied from month to month. It was increased by charges for milk and vegetables, by small loans, by the use of Miss Miller's credit with grocers when De Quincey's credit was *nil*. It reached £33 in April 1837, in spite of occasional payments; falling to £12 in May; rising through 1838 and 1839, until when the rooms were finally surrendered, it reached the not inconsiderable sum of £175 4s. 2d. This debt troubled De Quincey until his death and was finally settled by his executor.

During these years also appear several suits in the Bailie's court. (See Appendix I.)

On 24 November 1836 (Records of Protections) De Quincey registered a second time in Sanctuary. He had returned thither in the preceding May; but because of the lack of £2 or because he felt no pressing need to take this legal step, he deferred the matter for more than six months.

After the death of his wife, De Quincey added to his expenses by taking rooms with Margaret Craig, since he found it impossible to find the necessary quiet for writing with his family at Miss Miller's.

On 18 October 1837 two bills against De Quincey came to Protest, one for £20 and one for £100. The suits were the result of his having endorsed out of friendship two notes for one Major Miller, an 'Abbey Laird.' The following fragmentary draft for a letter to an unknown correspondent, evidently a legal adviser, is among the Bairds Smith MSS.

## XV

IN the spring of 1837 Margaret De Quincey was drawing towards the end of her life. In March 1836 she had been very ill. It may be that the death of William was among the last straws which were breaking her. But the end came through typhus fever, after an illness of six weeks, on August 7, at the age of 41. Her grave is in the West Kirkyard where in 1859 her husband was laid beside her, and where, one hopes, Julius and William are also buried.<sup>22</sup>

What sort of woman she was it is hard to make out. No one of De Quincey's friends has left any records of her. Her daughter, Mrs. Bairdsmith, writes little that is convincing about her; but she points out that she had inherited John Simpson's intellectual tastes and that she had developed under her husband's tutelage. De Quincey could hardly have per-

'The death of Major Miller my friend in August 1837 entailed upon me separately a large debt of which a small part was really mine. There was a singular concurrence of adverse coincidents in this case. The Major's death was not sudden; and yet *quoad* myself it was so; for he died within 48 hours of my poor wife. The six weeks of her illness had coincided with the last six of his. And such was my alarm through this period, — that sincerely as I was attached to Major M., yet not supposing him in danger, I never went near him after his death was anticipated. Nor, if I had, could I have brought myself in such circumstances to disturb him about our mutual money transactions. These had all taken the shape of Bills: and two persons were parties to them besides the Major and myself. The Major died as I have said, with no settlement made between us. One of those two persons, his Agent, Mr. Adam Wilson who only knew to whom belonged the real *onus* of every transaction, had died some months previously of brain fever. . . One person then remained who could have exonerated me from part (*viz.* £100) of the debt. This was Mr. J. J. Smith, the same who recently absconded to America. But here again an odd accident occurred. He was the man who had discounted for Maj. Miller such bills as Mr. Ad. Wilson had for some cause declined to discount. . . . Already six months before the Major's death he had reimbursed to himself this £100 out of a sum of £950 paid into his hands on my account by the Caledonian Insurance Co. The last fact was not clearly made out until about a year ago: for so long he shuffled about making an account. And, when at last he did under terror of the law, I was no longer in a condition to prosecute my right. I mention the case here because Major Miller's relations, knowing that Mr. Ad. Wilson's brother the Advocate has very forbearingly not pursued his claim against me, fancy that I have suffered by Major Miller's death only in the sense of liabilities, but not by any actual pressure. The case is otherwise: and in the way I have stated, besides other ways.'

For further items see Appendix I.

<sup>22</sup> In the Parochial Register, Burial Record, St. Cuthbert's Graveyard, Edinburgh, Margaret is recorded as 39 at the time of her death; but she was born in 1796. (Baptized on March 21. See Grasmere Parish Register.) So that she was in her 42nd year.

sisted so long in his attachment to her, had she not had some intellectual sympathies to keep their relationship real. He tells us that she was practical in her ordering of his affairs, in keeping his bills and papers in shape. Yet in one letter, he tells us that she was not a good manager. She 'had already in 1831, brought me into heavy difficulties. . . The cause of it lay very much in qualities for which originally I loved her. . . Not that she had any expensive habits in her own person, but that she was incapacitated by temper from controlling a household of vicious servants such as we found requisite in Gt. King St. and she was preyed upon openly and secretly by grasping relatives.' Yet she must have had a good deal of practical sense to keep her family of children together. She was certainly not strong. She was loyal to her father. All that we know makes us feel that she was an honest and simple soul, struggling against odds almost beyond human power to meet. She was at least the mother of a fine group of sons and daughters.

Thomas De Quincey was left in August 1837 with a family of six children to care for. Fortunately the elder ones were getting to an age to look out for themselves in some measure. But apart from grief at the loss of his wife, the sense of helpless responsibility must have been crushing. Yet under all the strain, his health seems to have been reasonably good.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>84</sup> 'This day, Sunday, March 5, 1837, — about 1 or  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour after Dinner (a few spoonfuls of minced collups not so well dressed as usual, viz. just too large, and with a little potatoes and a quant. of Rice (suppose 2 oz.) — preceded however by 1 bason — a slop basin, or 2 breakfast cupfuls [?] of rice broth thick with rice) — also having had no breakfast (for, over a cup of coffee brought to me in bed about  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 10 or 11, I fell asleep after taking two or three tea-spoonfuls) — also having had no supper last night, — I was led to remark, being down in my writing room, an excessive degree of what in some degree or other I have remarked many months (ever since dining with Talfourd at Johnen's) — namely of healthy power. Tho' after dinner, and just so far after as is generally most fatal to power or activity, I felt as in early morning after breakfast and a fine night's sleep. In fact ever since I made the great discovery now to be mentioned — viz. not to sup — I have felt my health delightful. About  $4\frac{1}{2}$  months or so, I have gone supperless to bed. Previously I had greatly improved my health by restraining as I thought the multitude of pills: intermitting that is and trusting to the power of nature under a previous impulse every 5th. or 6th. day; and on the other taking only 1 or 2 at the utmost, except for now and then (5 or 6 times a month) when I might take as much as 4, 5, or even 6. But nothing ever made the same difference as omitting supper: 4 or 5 times I have *not* omitted it simply to try the effect: Twice at least it was *milk*; and INSTANTLY, to say nothing of later effects towards morning and on waking, my throat was besieged by that hideous neces-

sity of *hemming away*; and most violently. The last time was either on Tuesday, or on Wedn. last Feb. 28 — and March 1: I think the first. And the supper was *mulled ale*. Here I had no hemming, nor indeed *any* effect in the early night. But towards morning, instead of the usual certain negation — the absolute O, — I had the most shocking sensations — both of clogging in the intestines, and of taste (green nondescript). Finally to sum up, — excepting only about 70 or 75 miles of walking in the fortnight or ten days succeeding to the dinner at Johnen's, I have not walked or taken any exercise for years: no, except at Lingstube, not for years. And yet I am as perfectly well and as *availably* well for every purpose of exertion as it is almost possible to be. I must add that ever since my family's coming to the Abbey (now nearly three years) I have taken spirits: first about 2 or 3 glasses; and often for some months milk and rum; but for the last 2 years or so water and spirits; often, I fear, bad spirits. For the last 4 or 5 months, perhaps more, I too much exceeded the proper quant: often taking 4 or 5 wine glasses of spirit: seldom less than 3½. In the last 10 days however, (with 2 exceptions, when I took 3½ or 4) I have restricted myself to 2½ glasses; last night (Sat. Mar. 4) to 2½; this night, Sunday M. 5, to 2 or rather less.' (BS. MSS.)

## CHAPTER XVIII

### EDINBURGH

1837-1841

#### I

IN THE autumn of this same year, 1837, De Quincey was not safe even in sanctuary. By the beginning of November he was in hiding *out* of Holyrood! The situation had become very complicated. He had fled from creditors in Edinburgh; and then his debts had grown in the Abbey, so that he had had to flee, in turn, from his creditors there. The result is that he was dodging about. Since Thursday, the 4th of December, he wrote, 'I have been obliged to *quit my lodgings* from having been traced; and until I make some settlement with creditors now pursuing me (which pursuit has obliged me to quit my lodgings 3 several times since Nov. 5) — I cannot return' for some manuscript left behind. Edinburgh being bigger than the Abbey was a safer hiding-ground; and so he lived, furtive, lonely, and fearful.

In a letter of 25 April 1838 he wrote to Tait: —

'Three separate times, in three separate lodgings, I had been traced by the emissaries of my creditors; and always through the carelessness of my children, who suffered themselves to be followed unconsciously. Well: at length I had found an asylum in the house of three most amiable and interesting young women — the daughters of a Scottish friend, now deceased, to whom I was greatly attached. Could there be a happier situation? Better or more excellent creatures than these three sisters never existed: — their house is elegant and spacious; their servants too numerous to feel the addition of a single inmate as any burthen; from all care, forethought, or expense, I was entirely liberated; and finally, though breakfasting and passing the day alone until 6 o'clock at night, — *after* that hour, at dinner, tea, and for as many hours of the evening as I pleased, I had the luxuries of elegant female so-

ciety, polished conversation, music, and all those delicate attentions which, as you know, wherever there is kindness of heart and gentleness of manner, flow so naturally and so delightfully from female hands. — Certainly amongst this Trinity of Scottish lasses, so innocent — so gentle — and so kind-hearted, and to me especially (as their father's friend) so almost filial in their goodness and hospitalities, I passed the very happiest month that I have known for a long, long time; happier indeed than I had believed it possible for me to experience under the circumstances which surround me. In reality I knew, I said, that it was *too* happy to last. Every morning, as I rose, I whispered to myself — this will be my last day with my young hostesses. And accordingly on Sunday last I proved to be right. That morning brought me information, past all doubting, that I had been traced: — and guess by whom: it is not pleasant to mention one's own charities; but I cannot else make you understand the shock which I received. Four months ago, or it may be more, a certain Peggy Brown — a char woman, a washerwoman, etc. etc. in the Abbey — had been discharged from the infirmary as cured of a fever. Cured she was, but weak and incapable of work: so at least I heard: I sent my little daughter Florence to see her; for she had formerly worked occasionally as an assistant of my servants; and upon Florence's report, I continued to send her what I presumed might support her for some weeks until I heard of her entire restoration to strength. This woman it is, and no other, who has driven me from my quiet sanctuary. She pursued little Fred. by night and more than once; and in the hearing of a young woman (a servant in my family who knew my secret and has kept it faithfully) she boasted of her discovery. After this I knew there was no more safety for me. She, that is P. B., pretends, (I understand) that she does not mean to make any hostile use of her knowledge: but that an *old* woman should have taken the trouble to follow a light-footed child for a mile and a half, and more than once, with no view to a profitable use of her discovery, somewhat transcends my faith. On Sunday night therefore I took a sorrowful leave of my three fair friends: and, except to *them*, I have confided the secret of my new abode to no human creature — not even to

my children; for they have too little presence of mind and too little discretion.' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The late Sir John Findlay owned what was apparently a facsimile of this letter. I have never seen the original, if it exists. I think that it has never been printed.

Mrs. Bairdsmith in a letter to Mr. Findlay in regard to this very letter says of her father's 'enthusiastic description of his relations with these ladies,' that 'far from exaggerating [he] does not seem to me to convey one half the beauty of their gracious lives'; she speaks from remembrance, for she 'more than any others of the family benefitted at a very forlorn time of [her] young life.'

She then goes on to comment upon the letter interestingly, even though I believe that her comments are not supported in all respects by the facts which she could not have known. 'I have no need to look to dates to know that when he wrote that letter he was in the slough of despond; the whole tone reveals it even if I had forgotten the particular facts, the letter of course I have no remembrance of. Its main purpose is like the cuttle fish to throw ink in the eyes of the enemy, and himself, for the failure of some MSS. for the Maga. . . . It was an accepted fact among us that he was able when saturated with opium to persuade himself and delighted to persuade himself (the excitement of terror was a real delight to him) that he was dogged by dark and mysterious foes, at the same time this persuasion gave a sanction to his conscience for getting away from the crowded discomforts of a home without any competent head where truly no home should have been, and where as truly he could by no possibility have done any work had he remained. But carefully weighing my words I say that at any time within my cognizance £50 would have cleared him from all his liabilities, and this I knew he could have made at any moment by a few days' steady work, was indeed making constantly, but from his childish recklessness in business habits he never got the good of it. I will tell you one story the like of which there are dozens illustrating these habits which comes to my mind on the instant, viz. as concerning a rather larger sum than usually we dealt in. He had stuck his family into miserable lodgings in Holyrood for which he paid for years enormously; a bill of £50 had accumulated which at certain dates his assured income enabled him to meet, and he and I went down to pay our landladies, a set of scamps of the purest water with our £50 in our hands, and after courtesies such as you can imagine, he paid them £49.15s. in order to save himself from having to ask for a receipt. I tried to make a feeble careful little protest, but to no purpose. His fixed principle so long as I had intimate knowledge of him was never to ask for a receipt especially from a woman. The best evidence however of what his liabilities ever amounted to is afforded by the fact that when my elder brother and sister had got to an age to make a stand and he was persuaded to give up the management of his small fixed income into our hands, we were able, and please observe this, out of an income then and for long after reduced to £100 a year to pay off all just claims, and to leave the hole in Holyrood for our decent little home at Lasswade, a change which rests in my memory as one of the most lively foretastes of Paradise I have had in my life. (Our tastes were and still are simple you know.) From that time when he chose to occupy it he had always a home free from every difficulty. So you may guess what of reality there can be for us in these groanings unutterable about creditors and enemies. I repeat it was simply that he enjoyed the mystery & excitement, and other things such as escaping visitors and other social maladies will readily occur to you, as enhancing the desirableness of these disappearances.

'And now it occurs to me to ask you what years you think these hoary headed chartered libertines "little Fred" and "little Florence" might have attained when they were expected to elude the detective eyes of the astute

## II

For a number of months during this year these three hostesses played an important rôle in De Quincey's life. Not only did they receive and deliver his mail; but we hear of one or another doing errands for him with Mr. Blackwood. On May 25 they moved from 31 Windsor Street to Duncan Street where again he visited them, if not to stay; for he was able at

Peggy Brown? My brother was under ten and I but little over seven.' [As a matter of fact Fred was twelve and Florence was eleven.] 'One may laugh at the picture of the charity organisation imp of seven interviewing Peggy Brown and deciding whether she was a fit object for charity, the said Peggy helping towards maturing the judgment most likely by the bribe of a green apple that being the way of corrupt practice in those early days. This Peggy being also I am firmly convinced at this time the sole pursuing force. He could only rid himself of supporting her, and her finely developed taste for whiskey by deserting his family. But one laughs at the wrong side of one's mouth when the memory of my Father's terrible, but blessed be God never disastrous, fatuity about the care & protection of his children crops up in this letter. Imagine what was the temptation to a boy of from ten or thirteen idling about the purlieus of a great Town waiting here and there at all hours and for many hours at a time often. Nor does it seem to me there was anything to make it less of an apprehension for a girl from seven to thirteen, which was my own case, and as my Father always liked best to have his girls about him, on me fell the main burden and I know the north and southbacks of the Canongate, George the Fourths Bridge the cross causeway &c as hideous dreams, my heart rushing into my mouth with the natural terrors of foot-steps approaching and rushing down again into my shoes when left to quiet and the ghosts. When he turned up it was all right, and I am sure I never told him what I suffered, children are but dumb dogs about some things and I was blessed at that time with much natural stupidity. But if he was responsible at this time what can be said of him? You who knew him when the terrible burden of a family that he literally didn't know what to do with, and when he had the foul Fiend of opium in check, will I am sure, acquit him on the ground of insanity. But unless this can be, and ought to be made evident, there are plenty of people still left to seize on a letter like this and make him responsible for running away from his family for his own enjoyment, while his little children are blamed because they cannot skulk and trick and dodge his imaginary pursuers. This letter with the lights of memory upon it is to us a sad recalling of a time of aberration of intellect on my Father's part, to others it might seem something worse.

'By the way as another illustration of the "state of his affairs." Were you ever among the kind friends legion by name I should think, who offered to try and arrange them for him? If so you would know there was no bringing him to book, so that some gave up under the impression things were too bad to be meddled with, others that there was nothing to arrange, others which was the truth that he didn't like to have them arranged as it disturbed the prevailing mystery in which he delighted. I quite admit he was always under a sense of £5 here or there owing which he cuddled and made much of, but which wouldn't amount to "affairs" when required to do so, and which he could generally have freed himself from by a search for money buried among his papers. I am sure you will think some of this is exaggeration and very ill-timed jesting but it is a life's solemnity to us.'

In comment, I can only say that De Quincey must naturally enough have



last to stir abroad at night. Indeed, on that same May 25, he proposed to call at Robert Blackwood's house to talk over two articles at a quarter before ten — evidently, because he dared not go to 45 George Street by day. On 26 May 1838 De Quincey wrote to Miss Jessie Miller, evidently one of the young ladies, a 'sentimental' letter, which shows the warm friendship he felt for her.

Saturday Morning, May 26, 1838.

My dear Miss Jessie,

In some beautiful verses where the writer has occasion to speak of festivals, household or national, that revolve annually, I recollect at this moment from his description one line to this effect —

*'Remembered half the year and hoped the rest.'*

Thus Christmas, suppose, is a subject for *memory* until midsummer, after which it becomes a subject for *hope*, because the mind ceases to haunt the image of the past festival in the dawning anticipation of another that is daily drawing nearer. 'Well,' I hear you say, 'a very pretty sentimental opening for a note addressed to a lady! but what is the *moral* of it?'

The moral, my dear Miss Jessie, is this — that I, soul-sick of endless writing, look back continually with sorrowful remembrances to the happy interval which I spent under your roof; and next after that, I regret those insulated evenings (scattered here and there) which, with a troubled pleasure — pleasure anxious and boding — I have passed beneath the soft splendours of your lamps since I was obliged to quit the quiet haven of your house. Sorrowful, I say, these remembrances are, and must be by contrast with my present gloomy solitude; and if they ever cease to be sorrowful, it is when some new evening to be spent underneath the same lamps comes within view. *That* which is *remembered* only suddenly puts on the blossoming of *hope*, and wears the vernal dress of a happiness to come, instead of the sad autumnal dress of happiness that has vanished.

Is this sentimental? Be it so; but then also it is intensely

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kept his legal and financial troubles from his young children, if not his poverty; that Mrs. Bairdsmith, also, naturally enough had no idea of the protests and hornings. When she arrived at an age when the difficulties died down, she would naturally look back and infer that her father's troubles were less than they were reputed, with the result that she concluded that they existed largely in his imagination. The documentary evidence which is presented in this book refutes her conclusions.

As to the incident of Peggy Brown, that may have been in part the creation of nervous fear rather than fact. But his suspicions were in general justified.

There can be no doubt that he was thoughtless of his young children in his demands upon their goings and comings at all hours of day and night.

true; and sentimentality cannot avail to vitiate truth; on the contrary, truth avails to dignify and exalt the sentimental. But why breathe forth these feelings, sentimental or not, precisely on this vulgar Saturday? (for Saturday is a day radically vulgar to my mind, incurably sacred to the genius of marketing, and hostile to the sentimental in any shape). 'Why?' you persist in asking. Simply because, if this is Saturday, it happens that tomorrow is Sunday; and on a Sunday night only, *if even then*, I can now approach you without danger. And what I fear is — that you so strict in your religious observances, will be dedicating to some evening lecture, or charity sermon, or some missionary meeting, that time which *might* be spent in Duncan Street, and perhaps, — pardon me for saying so — more profitably. 'How so?' Why, because, by attending the missionary meeting, for example, you will, after all, scarcely contribute the 7th, or even the 70th, share to the conversion of some New Zealander or feather-cinctured prince of Owhyce. Whereas now, on the other hand, by vouchsafing your presence to Duncan Street, you will give — and not to an unbaptized infidel, who can never thank you, but to a son of the Cross, who will thank you from the very centre of his heart — a happiness like that I spoke of as belonging to recurring festivals, furnishing a subject for *memory* through one half of the succeeding interval, and for *hope* through the other.

That is not sentimentality, Miss Jessie; you cannot say so. It is as deeply — as religiously true as anything you will hear to-morrow. Well: I will take my chance of finding you at home after this appeal to your goodness. One thing only, let me say — give me no whiskey: and I will tell you why. With other people one gradually learns familiarity. But *you* cause one to travel in the very inverse order: *you*, Miss Jessie, recall one (and recall one by the very force of familiar friendship) to those more delicate and apprehensive thoughts of respect which one ought not to have lost sight of from the first. One of these thoughts, recently occurring to me, is — that I ought not to have annoyed ladies in the drawing room by my potations; an indulgence on their part extorted from a deep sense of hospitality, but odious perhaps otherwise to their feelings.

Florence was with me yesterday morning, and again throughout the evening; and, by the way, dressed in your present. Perhaps she may see you before I do, and may tell you that I have been for some time occupied at intervals in writing some memorial 'Lines for a Cenotaph to Major Miller, of the Horse Guards Blue,' and towards which I want some information from you. The lines are about thirty-six in number.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The ladies *seem* to have been the daughters of Major Miller whom De Quincey had known in the Abbey. They are obviously not related to Miss

## III

THESE letters are sentimental in expression; but De Quincey was often sentimental in fact. Even before his wife's death, he had been driven by his need of quiet to leave his family; and to that end he had as early as 15 May 1834 rented a room near by in the Abbey in the house of a Miss Craig. 'I rent one room of her at 8 shillings a week,' he wrote on 21 February 1838.<sup>3</sup> 'Of course this might have been had at a much cheaper rate when taken for long periods; but knowing her to be a woman of excellent heart who had met with serious misfortunes, — I did not wish to drive any hard bargain with her.' Then, in spite of a considerable debt, perhaps because of it, he became Cautioner for Margaret Craig for *her* back payments or rent for the previous four years and for the following year up to May 1839.<sup>4</sup> Thus he took upon himself the responsibility of guaranteeing the debts of his excellent-hearted landlady while his family was in direst straits — soon, indeed, to be actually suffering from lack of food; and he had taken no receipts for payments because he hated to take receipts for money paid to a lady!

Once in 1837 he was actually under arrest. Adam Black, the publisher, 'found the little man one day in the hands of the sheriff's officers conveying him to Calton gaol. He stopped the melancholy procession and finding the debt for which De Quincey was seized to be under £30, he became responsible for it on condition of De Quincey's furnishing the articles on Shakespeare and Pope' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 7th Edition, which then was being prepared for publication; a condition which De Quincey faithfully performed.<sup>5</sup>

He was greatly handicapped in writing these articles by a

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Miller, the landlady of Holyrood. Page, I, 306 ff.; for passages omitted, BS. MSS. Japp dates this letter 1837; but the MS. reads 1838, and internal evidence makes any other date impossible.

<sup>3</sup> To an unknown correspondent. This letter is in the possession of the Misses Masson.

<sup>4</sup> This obligation was still troubling him in 1855.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Robert Carruthers to A. H. Japp, reporting the incident as he had heard it from Black, in my possession.

On 12 January 1838, De Quincey was again arrested, but was saved by an appeal to Robert Blackwood. (Bl. MSS.; 12 January 1838.)

lack of books. As he says in a letter to Black on 16 July 1838,<sup>6</sup> the article on Shakespeare was drawn in regard to the sonnets and dates, entirely from memory. It was hard work; and in addition he was struggling under the consciousness of his inability to keep his family from suffering. There is a poignant passage in his review of Forster's *Life of Goldsmith* which refers to the time before and after his wife's death. Goldsmith had had his worries and struggles; but — and here De Quincey sees himself in tragic contrast — *he* had had immunity 'from the responsibilities of a family. Wife and children he had not. They it is that, being a man's chief blessings, which create also for him the deadliest of his anxieties, that stuff his pillows with thorns, that surround his daily path with snares. Suppose the case of a man who has helpless dependents of this class upon himself summoned to face some sudden failure of his resources: how shattering to the power of exertion, and above all, of exertion by an organ so delicate as the creative intellect, dealing with subjects so coy as those of imaginative sensibility, to know that instant ruin attends his failure. Success in such paths of literature might at the best be doubtful; but success is impossible with any powers whatever, unless in a genial state of those powers; and this geniality is to be sustained, in the case supposed, whilst the eyes are fixed upon the most frightful of abysses yawning beneath his feet. He is to win his inspiration for poetry or romance from the pre-lusive cries of infants clamouring for daily bread.' <sup>7</sup>

This actual situation on 21 December 1838, is vividly presented in a harrowing letter to John Wilson written from the Abbey whither De Quincey had returned for a time to join his family.<sup>8</sup>

Abbey — Holyrood Gardens  
Friday, Dec. 21, 1838.

My dear Wilson,

You may or may not be aware that about 3 months ago an art. of mine was thrown back upon my hands by Mr. Blackwood upon which more than upon any I ever wrote, I had relied for money. Immense distress followed. This same art.,

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, IV, 17n.

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, IV, 291.

<sup>8</sup> In possession of Wilson's granddaughter, Miss Bessie Wilson.

upon my belief that Mr. B. had misconceived it's nature, was sent again; and again returned. The *first* return had lost me the one sole credit I had (or *have* had for years) — viz. a grocer's in Duncan St. And since then my difficulties have increased to a horrid degree, considering that young children are obliged to have their part in them. Already in September my household, now of 9 persons, had been reduced to a single meal a day — usually at night. Even then my youngest daughter, 5 years old, besieged the ears of all about her with clamors for something to eat from morning till night; and this, with every indulgence of course to her and her old maternal grandfather (living with us since early in February),<sup>9</sup> could not be found for her so as to leave anything at all for others. Once from a payment of £5, and twice from smaller receipts, our situation has improved for a time: but even from these sums a good deal went in arrears to a servant. Once also, when at the very worst, I received £45 from Bristol: but the *whole* of this, under a contract of peculiar solemnity, I was obliged to pay over within an hour of its arrival to Miss Mary Miller of this house for rent.<sup>10</sup> Now and for three weeks back the pressure has been worse than ever: no article of dress, nor household utensil belonging to me, no plate received under my uncle's will, but has long disappeared (you may be sure) at the pawnbroker's.

Well: I need not pursue the odious recital. The story is humiliating enough. Now for the *causes*: and let it be considered fairly whether any man under the same circumstances could have done better. Am I unable to write? Far from it: I was never so able in my whole life. But to what end should I write? 1. For Tait I *have* written more than he can print in 2 years: he grossly miscalculates the proportion between my hand and letter-press; miscalculates by two-thirds: and for the one third I have long ago received payment; that is, my creditors have had part, I the rest. 2. To Black of the *Encycl. [Britannica]* the same objection precisely, tho' not quite to the same extent, applies as to Tait: he also undercalculates. Besides which, 50 per cent. upon *all* I write goes to Mr. Craig the Tailor of Waterloo Bridge. Were it otherwise, however, I have now for several weeks exhausted all the subjects (Pope and Shakspeare) for which I had books. Those articles have been long finished. — 3. There remains Mr. Blackwood. Now naturally my spirits are low, finding the best art. I ever wrote rejected. Low spirits, no fire in such a winter, often no candles, these are bad "aids to reflexion." However, I have written another art.; *half a sheet*; entitled "English Language," taking

<sup>9</sup> It is impossible to keep track of John Simpson's dwelling with De Quincey.

<sup>10</sup> The accounts of Miss Miller, already cited, proved this correct to the dot.

for its suggestion, rather than its text, Guest's *Hist. of English Rhythms*. And with respect to this art. my request is what follows: — You, I presume, if not an habitual advisor of Mr. Bl., *can* advise him. Would you for once throw your eye over this paper? *It is only half a sheet*. I send it now; and early to-morrow morning, by 8 at latest, will send the closing page — taking a slight notice of Mr. Guest's book. If upon your report it were accepted, perhaps also by a word or two from you, the money (or a part of the money) might be paid to-morrow morning. But if you cannot do me this service to-night, I fear it will answer little purpose. Even this night I know not how to get over; still less how to continue to write the small remainder.

Ever yours faithfully,  
Thomas De Quincey.

P.S. I have nearly finished a Tale connected with the Black Forest: and, if I were not without any coat as well as many other parts of dress — so that to go out even covered up by a borrowed cloak is now become impossible, — I could, by visiting the College, make articles in abundance. Never was I in so much force for writing; but as respects *Maga*, I am thoroughly disheartened; for I do not perceive the law or principle on which Bl. rejects or receives. But for Heaven's sake do not speak to Bl. of an *unfinished* paper: that is only by way of letting you have time to read it. The two pages wanting shall come down early, I repeat, to-morrow morning.

The article on the *English Language* was accepted, presumably through the good offices of Wilson, and printed in the April number of *Maga*, 1839. But the letter shows that while De Quincey felt able to appeal to his old friend in direst need for his kind offices, he saw at this time little of him.

#### IV

AFTER the last two articles on *The Caesars* in June and July, 1834, nothing of De Quincey's appeared in *Blackwood's* until *The Revolt of the Tartars* in 1837; although he was still *writing for Maga* in October, 1834. Then Tait had the monopoly, with De Quincey's autobiographical articles running from 1834 to 1841; the only other important paper not autobiographical being *A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism and Radicalism*. When he resumed connexion with *Blackwood's*, he wrote for both magazines, sometimes giving one

and sometimes the other the greater share in his production, until the final break with *Blackwood's* in 1845.

During these shifts in allegiance, De Quincey was not always easy in conscience. Whether there were solid grounds for his fears or not, he had the suspicion that Robert Blackwood looked with disfavour at his contributing to the rival publication; and he wrote at least twice to Mr. Blackwood in the apologetic vein. In 1839 (January 3), he had heard an insinuation that his writing for Tait 'injured him' with Blackwood; but he assured Blackwood that he had not written for Tait for some months, since what was being printed had been written during the preceding summer. 'Generally,' he wrote, 'you cannot doubt that for many reasons I should prefer writing for your journal. But my debts, though nearly at an end, still oblige me to write 2 sheets a month. Here is my reason for writing elsewhere.'<sup>11</sup> Seven months later he returned again to the subject (30 August 1840). 'No matter what the value of a writer's contributions may be, they may be so trivial as to make it a matter of indifference whether he does or does not write for a journal, — still as respects *his* obligations, he is bound to feel certain services done to himself as moral restraints from offering his own services in any quarter but one.'

Of the 'certain services' done, many, no doubt, unrecorded, there are at least two which had a sort of binding force upon De Quincey. One was the willingness of Robert Blackwood to help him in satisfying creditors. Early in 1839 the impatient Albion Cloth Company, after fruitless pressure upon their debtor, conceived the idea of going directly to Blackwood's as the source of much of De Quincey's income and of asking for a certain percentage of any sums he might earn. De Quincey was grateful to his editor for acceding to such an arrangement involving no little inconvenience to the

<sup>11</sup> The 'reason' a few days later led him to apply to William Chambers of *Chambers' Magazine* on 23 January 1839 for an opportunity to produce 'a series of Essays on Life, Manners, Literature or other subjects. — The first Essay I propose to write would be entitled *Conversation as an Art*.' Nothing came of the offer. The essay on Conversation was finally published by Tait in 1847.

The Letter to Chambers was printed by Lady Priestley, daughter of William Chambers, in her *Story of a Lifetime*, p. 56.

publishing house. The fact that Tait in his apparently unfriendly way would not adopt a similar plan, gave De Quincey only a deeper sense of obligation to the Blackwoods.

But there was another reason, especially valid during these difficult years. In his poverty, suffering and ill health, there were times when De Quincey's pen refused to obey him. In June 1838, he had submitted an article too long and too diffuse. The substance was good, but the paper needed pruning. Robert Blackwood, mindful of the fact that a rejected essay would work hardship, arranged to have someone else revise it. There is pathos in De Quincey's gratitude at the suggestion and in his willingness to have another do what he in his circumstances was unable to do, namely, to 'weigh, compare — or revise as much as usual.' This inability persisted for several years, the inability to judge his own work, to condense and to revise. There were times when papers were flatly rejected; yet De Quincey never complained. 'You dislike it. And there is an end of the question,' he wrote on one occasion. 'I wrote this paper as a desperate resource on acct. of my children. . . Here I had thought is a *subject* which will be the anchor to pull me up, no matter how it may be treated. *Diis akiter visum est.*'

If, as seems usually to have been the case, the Blackwoods were considerate, there were moments when De Quincey found matters of complaint. The editors were busy men; De Quincey was constantly writing notes of apology or of question, often long and involved. Yet on De Quincey's side those notes were of intense concern and sprang of terrible needs. For instance, this. Blackwood had not answered explicitly some question. 'Writing (as I am often compelled to do) in the street, I am under good security that I shall use no superfluous words. At a better moment I may trouble you with a remark on the systematic neglect with which you have treated my letters for about the last twenty days — letters containing 3 questions as urgent as the occasions of a long life can often have raised to any man. . . . If my notes (though models of brevity *in consistency with full explanation*) are so burthensome for you to read, assuredly they are much more so for me to write: and the sole way of preventing them



(which I can think of) is — the very obvious one of *forestalling* my application. No *cause* arising for letters, I can promise you a perpetual immunity from mine.' (1 February 1839). And on the very next day came an even more emphatic note. There can be no doubt that he was sometimes irritable and irritating; but there were reasons.

## V

DE QUINCEY had changed his lodgings again. By 10 October 1839, he was living at 113 Princes Street in the house of a Mr. and Mrs. McIndoe. It was a house with which he was to have long associations, not pleasant. From February 15 to May 21, 1838, two of his sons and his brother-in-law had stayed there; and it would seem possible that De Quincey himself kept a room there from about that period until he eloped to Glasgow in 1841. He was constantly in debt to the McIndoes; and their efforts to force him to pay up embittered their lodger's life to such an extent that in De Quincey's mind McIndoe became a very 'devil.' The McIndoe episode is well documented and is so revealing of De Quincey's attitude toward his landlord creditors that it justifies a full narrative.<sup>12</sup>

De Quincey settled in at 113 Princes Street by accident. McIndoe was, about 1838, one of his creditors; and ignorant as his letters show him to have been, McIndoe was an S. S. C. (Solicitor of the Supreme Court). De Quincey had gone to his house on some business on a Sunday night, and had stayed so late that he could not 'leap the boundary' of sanctuary before midnight; and when the kindly Mrs. McIndoe noticed that 'some essential part of the dreamer's out-

<sup>12</sup> Certain facts may, however, be relegated to the footnotes. De Quincey was sued on 3 October 1838 by Mrs. McIndoe for £15 *gs. 6d.*; and he was pursued by this debt into Holyrood, as is seen in the Processes there on 29 October 1838. On 10 February 1839 De Quincey gave McIndoe a note payable in two months for £76 *ss. 6d.* — a note protested for non-payment on 6 April 1839. Apparently this Protest was not carried to Horning because Blackwood agreed to pay a certain percentage of De Quincey's earnings directly to McIndoe towards the debt. De Quincey in a letter to Blackwood, 20 August 1839, mentions that one half of his last two remittances had been paid to his landlord. By September 24 he had thus paid McIndoe more than was owing him on the original note; but since he continued to live at 113 Princes Street, the debt itself was kept alive. Even after his escape to Glasgow in March 1841, the debt continued as a worry for years.

going raiment was wanting ' and asked him to spend the night that she might have time to mend it, De Quincey accepted the invitation, and stayed on for, apparently, three years.<sup>18</sup>

We know nothing of his early stay. The pertinent correspondence begins on 1 April 1840; and it is worth noting that although landlord and lodger were both living under the same roof the controversy was carried on by writing.

The correspondence which is preserved among the Blackwood manuscripts is opened by McIndoe's complaining of the length of a letter from De Quincey; pointing out that the amount due was far too large and that it had latterly been reduced only by a mere pittance, namely, two pounds. Unless, McIndoe concluded, five pounds were paid by one o'clock on the following Friday, De Quincey must leave 113 Princes Street.

In a letter which enclosed this communication of McIndoe, De Quincey wrote to Mr. Blackwood:

' Mr. McIndoe has latterly betrayed a strong spirit of extortion: to this I have neither wholly yielded, nor showed that resolute opposition which I should have done under more favourable circumstances. The truth is — if I am to go away at this moment, I should draw upon myself a sort of legal persecution which at present would be ruinous. I wish to stay a month longer. Meantime Mr. McIndoe, as you will see by this letter inclosed, makes the condition of my occupying his rooms any longer — the furnishing him with an extra £5 to meet a bill falling due tomorrow. Now it is probable that with half this sum I may negotiate so as to keep my hold a little longer; that is, for as much longer as I wish — viz. a month. The £10 received from you last week, has long since been distributed amongst other creditors who had as good a claim as Mr. McIndoe. It is possible that, looking forward to the MS. unpublished, — you may find that you *will* be in some little debt to me further on in this month: and may enable me to pay £2 or £3 to this very importunate person. I do not trouble you with any commentaries on his note which is filled with misrepresentations: (as in particular instead of £2, which accidentally was the payment of one particular day, within the month of March he has received already £7: viz. £2.10; £2.10; and £2). But I send his letter, (which have the goodness to let me have

<sup>18</sup> Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 57: and James Brown, *Life of Dr. W. B. Robertson*.

again to-morrow) merely to show the fact of his demand and the *animus*.'

Things were patched up for the moment. On 22 April 1840 however, De Quincey again wrote to Blackwood that he had endured 'continued molestations through the last 10 days, together with the necessity of giving up a particular room and consequently of sorting immense heaps of papers, with another even worse annoyance' — an annoyance not explained. If De Quincey remained, he must occupy less desirable quarters; where he had had two rooms, he must content himself with one. Again on 2 May 1840 came another note from McIndoe:

'Mr. McIndoe is astonished that Mr. De Quincey could have sent him such a note as that received' — evidently declaring that he could not raise another pound at the moment. 'Had he been requiring £1 for his own family it would have been easily procured. How Mr. De Quincey can suppose for one moment that he is to remain in his house to support an extravagant family while Mr. McIndoe is imputed with receiving all the money he acquires. Mr. McIndoe therefore requests that Mr. De Quincey shall remove to-night for he is resolved that no further communication shall take place between them on this subject and that before 10 o'clock, so as to prevent any unnecessary steps being taken.'

On May 4 De Quincey wrote again to Blackwood: —

'The most violent efforts at ejecting me have been made for the last 3 weeks. In fact from the moment that I refused peremptorily to sell a reversion for an old song (no Insurance Office consenting to insure my life under 13 percent on the argument that I had used Op. to excess, and (tho' most favourably reported on by all their medical officers) might do so again) — from that moment Mr. McIndoe has taken up a hostile attitude. Which I parried by refusing to pay him the sum (applied for some fortnight or so back) without a stipulation — and a written one — that he should give me 10 days' notice of removal. — This most reluctantly he did. But now, as you see by his note, he makes light of his own guarantee. His object is to eject me, possess himself of my papers, and hold those as a means of extracting money *ad libitum*.'

Here is one of De Quincey's constantly recurring fears, namely, that his landlord might get possession of his papers

and hold them as pledges. McIndoe did not dare to carry his case to the courts for the usual Protest and Horning, lest De Quincey should flee to sanctuary or hiding, and so escape from his reach. There was more hope of payment, as he saw it, in threatening and pressing; and, in the last resort, to get possession of those sacred papers and hold them, as De Quincey feared and suspected.

On 22 May 1840, De Quincey wrote again to Blackwood:

'Although it is painful to me to pursue every trifling contribution with a call upon you for money, the persecutions I suffer allow me no choice. These persecutions (Mr. McIndoe's chiefly) would not *directly* have driven me to this: but indirectly they do: for he has received so much the larger half of all money recently coming into my hands on the plea of rent-day (which, he insists, is the 15th. tho' I always found it the 25th.) — that I have unavoidably left my children short of their usual allowance. . . It is difficult to devise any plan for counteracting this injustice. You will read *my* plan. It involves no advance or loans or guarantee. You will judge: and, if you think it on the whole ineligible, I must turn my thoughts to something else. For, as things now are, I spend months after months in literary labour: I endure the extremity of personal privations; some of which it would be humiliating to describe; (but by way of illustration I may mention — that having in a moment of pinching difficulty for my children about 10 months since pawned every article of my dress which could produce a shilling, I have since that time had no stockings, no shoes, no neck-handkerchief, coat, waist-coat, or hat. I have sat constantly barefoot; and, being constitutionally or from the use of opium unusually sensible of cold, I should really have been unable to sit up and write but for a counterpane which I wrap round my shoulders). — Such hardships, and what to me in their medical results are worse hardships, and the utter solitude I have suffered for more than two years, I could support with some cheerfulness, — were they of any use to others. But the painful result from the whole is — that, after paying little to any creditor but one, as regards that one I am about £100 worse than I was when I began. This is terrific.'

Such a letter would have touched any one; and Blackwood wrote to De Quincey on the next day, 'I need hardly say that your note of yesterday has pained me beyond measure.' And with his friendly words he enclosed £4.

On October 20 De Quincey wrote again to Blackwood. Mrs. McIndoe had urged him to extremity by 'representation of a bill (of Exectn.) lying due under dangerous circumstances.' Two days after, a mere accident revealed to him that 'it was simply for the purpose of enabling Mr. McIndoe to have a week's excursion to Glasgow.' At the same time 'other discoveries of bad faith depressed De Quincey so much that [he] became ill.' <sup>14</sup>

(To Robert Blackwood)

Monday, 3 P.M. Nov. 30, 1840.

My dear Sir,

A most painful thing occurred to me this morning: and, as it is a matter of difficulty in *any* way of treating it, allow me to request that you will take the trouble of reading this letter attentively. I am truly sorry to occupy your time: and I will be short: But the case is attended with risk anyway; and is urgent.

I had scarcely gone to sleep at 8 A.M. this morning after a hard night's labour in writing, when I was awoken by Mr. McIndoe with the following clamorous statement — that on this day, this being the last day of November, he by annual custom as a Solicitor was called on to pay an annual sum of *twelve pounds* — the price of a license to practice in the courts; that his license was forfeited, if the money were not paid to-day: that he was short by £5; and that he relied on me to obtain this money for him through you.

Now I do not believe the statement as to the amount of the money; and hardly as to the peremptoriness of payment. And it rouses my indignation — that he should thus endeavour to abuse the influence which he chooses to ascribe to me. But what aggravates the case is — that he has had a most unusual proportion already of this month's remittances from you.

Therefore the case stands thus: the £5, even if I could obtain it, I do not wish that he should have. Meantime, if I give him nothing, he will immediately take occasion to write me a violent letter full of abuse. He will insist on my leaving his house. No matter what rights I may afterwards establish in law, he will obtain his immediate object of retaining my Papers — now a vast body, far above portability. Then he will purloin in one part; swearing that no such papers were amongst them; and as to the other, he will hold them as a screw for extorting money through years to come.

Now what I wish to ask of you in this emergency — is this: that you would let me have £2, and no more: But even this

will not avail me unless you could take the trouble to write me a line — saying that you could not conveniently send me more at present; or that you hoped *that* might answer the purpose, until the promised article was ready, when you would send the balance of £3.

This supposed 'article' is no fiction: if you will *send* on Monday morning next, Dec. 7, (*in the case of my not sending previously to you on Saturday or Friday*), — I shall have 2 *articles finished* that have been some time preparing. And if you are disposed to have a polit. art. I shall have a 3rd. ready in the course of next week.

Pray let me make myself understood: — I am obliged if I can to give him something in order to evade a rupture. The money of Saturday was necessarily paid away on my children's account to the last farthing in 2 hours after receiving it: they having been kept in arrears through the extra payments in the course of the month to Mr. McIndoe. My disgust is too great at this rapacity to allow of my proposing more than £2. Yet, if your note does not in some way allude to my promised articles, and the prospect of a £5 — the mere £2 will not avail: he will think I have asked only for that sum: and I might as well give him nothing. The upshot is — that if, in any way of wording it, you will speak of some money being ready on the receipt of an article, — I shall thus evade a quarrel: and shall have my papers.

Naturally you will ask, Do I mean to continue submitting to such extortion? — My answer is I came hither utterly ignorant of his character. I was caught and chained by my papers before I learned the truth. I have since by accident learned things that you would hardly think credible in a man supporting any character at all. — I am taking steps for my deliverance. But I am obliged to proceed cautiously: and amongst the cautions *I have earnestly to request that you will not leave this letter lying on any table open to strangers*. I am far from believing of any man having pretensions to honor or education — that he would do so vile a thing as read a private letter. But a boy among your servants, or a *porter*, (I point to no individual, but I know that subordinate servants of an establishment unsuspected and even unremembered by the heads of that establishment do often hold a corrupt intercourse with instructed people outside) might chance to make treacherous discoveries. It is certain — that this man does learn things unaccountably; and chiefly, I believe, by descending to a class of people against whom no precautions are taken.

Finally, I am sorry for the least semblance of finessing: but what makes it requisite? The crookedness of this man. Were he upright, or had he a sense of shame, none would be re-

quired. Many will say — But why in God's name does any man allow himself to be thus fleeced? Alas, it is the unique case, — the chain, the pledge of my papers. One set lost in Cumberland by knavery in my absence.<sup>15</sup> One set held by Miss Miller in the uttermost risk. And this set under the grasp of a needy man with no principle at all.

If you can oblige me, the best way will be — to let me have the £2, *expressly stating the amount* in your note; else if he understands all to rest on the article, he will worry my life out to write it within an impossible time. But the chief thing of all is — so to frame a line of answer as to make it appear that I had applied for £5.

Yours in greatest hurry, Very truly,  
T. De Quincey.

Blackwood wrote the desired letter of refusal to send more than £2; but he wrote it with so sincere a tone that De Quincey was frightened lest the make-believe might be real. And on December 3 De Quincey wrote to him: — 'I am perplexed: I had requested of you to frame a note so — that it might prevent Mr. — from fastening a quarrel on me. Your note has had that effect: and I am obliged to you for it. But also it seems by possibility designed for a secondary effect: i.e. that it is perhaps meant *bóna fide* and seriously for myself. If so, will you be kind enough to let me know that.' Robert Blackwood was playing his part too well; and De Quincey's keenness caught the *double entendre* which was present, as the publisher admitted with some plain speaking. Thus the next day, December 4, brought forth another letter from De Quincey. 'One thing alarms me in your note. I know not exactly what you mean by "mixing you up in my affairs."' But it would have needed little perspicacity to discover what Robert Blackwood meant. And what he meant brought about a change of policy in his dealings with De Quincey. No longer would Mr. Blackwood accept 'any portions of articles' and advance money on them; not a new policy, for the Blackwoods for years had been retreating to the same position after generous shifts from it.

But the terrible McIndoe was still menacing. De Quincey

<sup>15</sup> Another reference to a probable sojourn of his family near Penrith. Perhaps this loss is the cause for the preservation of the *Diary* of 1803, which came ultimately into the hands of the father of Mr. Steel in the Lake region.

dared not leave his rooms lest they be entered and closed to him in his absence. On December 4, he had written to Blackwood, 'Except Mrs. McIndoe once in 6 or 7 weeks, and my son Fred., I have seen no human being for 15 months. — Yes twice in that time, I have seen Mr. McInd., and of course the servant.' If he could only escape without sacrificing those papers! And finally, on 22 February 1841, there was hope. 'Now at length,' he wrote to Blackwood, 'I have a prospect of liberation from the dire perplexity of my position without sacrificing my MSS. which only have been the chain of compulsion fettering my free movements. The first consequence will be an immense command of subjects which at present are shut out to me simply from inability to go abroad and make use of libraries.' For once here was a prophetic hint which became reality. He actually left 113 Princes Street, took his most precious papers with him, and departed to Glasgow! About the beginning of March 1841 he was living there.<sup>16</sup>

## VI

ON 29 May 1840, De Quincey was promising Blackwood that he would soon finish the much delayed article on *Style* — 'a longish one.' He had been hindered by the very excess of his

<sup>16</sup> The McIndoes troubled him for a dozen years longer. On 14 May 1855 he writes to his Daughters (BS. MSS.): 'That hideous man who for years has persecuted me with claims of the most fantastic kind for pretended legal services, Mr. McIndoe, died on Friday last. It seems he was entirely broken down by drink. But a new persecution has replaced the old one. Since Saturday his two vagabond sons have besieged me with applications the most violent for pecuniary aid in burying him. Their pride is dismally disturbed at the thought of his having a pauper funeral. But of course I have refused to interfere. A more worthless man did not exist. After being often dismissed, and perhaps a dozen times reinstated at the earnest intercession of Mrs. P. H. — who could not resist the misery manifested by his ruined wife, — he offended more than ever, and was solemnly discharged for ever. There went to wreck 70 guineas a year, on which with *their* small family and Mrs. McInd.'s economy they might have lived in comfort. But this miserable wretch not content with sacrificing *that*, would not suffer his wife to obtain a livelihood by letting lodgings, such were the uproars that he kicked up every night. I suppose that a more absolute wreck of decent prosperity never can have been exemplified. Driven mad by ill-usage and something very like starvation, for all the furniture and clothes gradually disappeared at the pawnbroker's, — she also took to drinking by fits and starts. Luckily she could not often obtain drink. But at times she *did* obtain it, and drank to excess: in one of those excesses it was that she fell backwards on the area steps of a house in George Square, and 5 or 6 days after (having been found with her skull fractured by the police) died in the infirmary; not recognising I believe anybody whatever up to the moment of her death.'



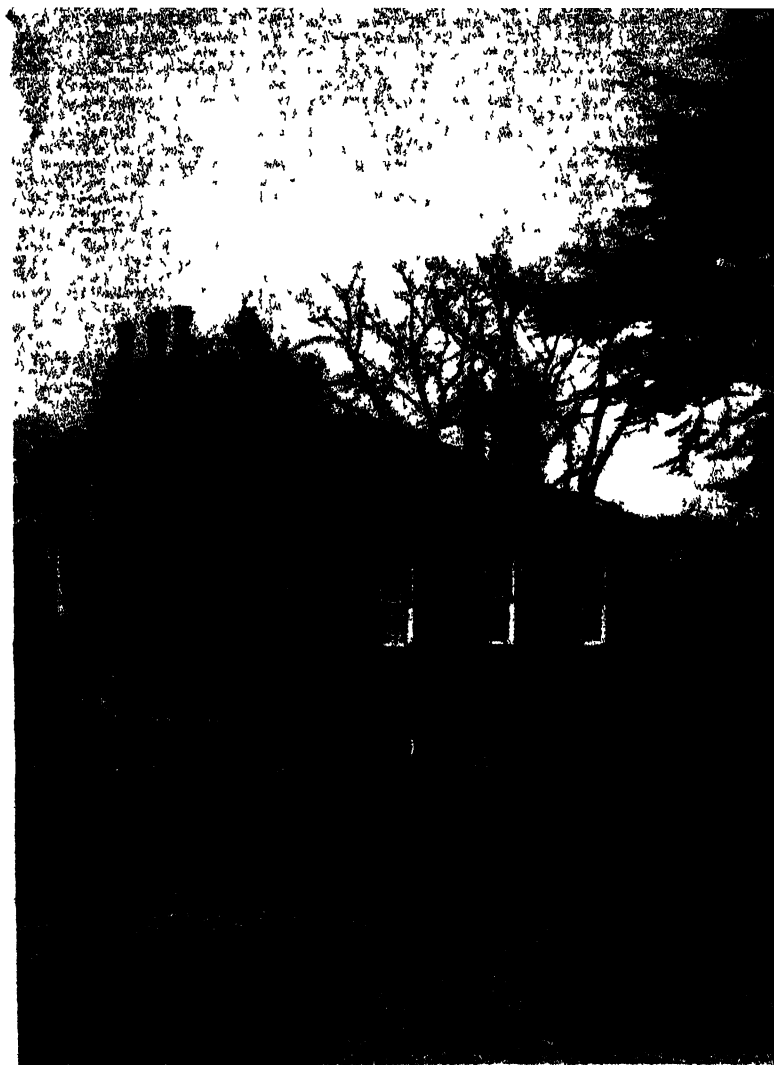
material; but for the last few days pressure from Miss Miller of Holyrood had made it impossible for him to concentrate. Ten days later he was still more agitated. 'For God's sake,' he wrote, 'if you can learn from anybody easily, obtain for me this information — Is it possible for vindictive purposes (I know not what others can govern the parties) to sell by auction a man's papers, all his letters, accounts, papers of every kind which form his only documents for purposes too numerous to mention.' <sup>17</sup> At last, things had reached a crisis in Holyrood; 'the legal necessity for my children resigning their rooms in the Abbey.' <sup>18</sup> To be sure, the family lingered on until August 12; but the forced removal proved to be most fortunate.

The children had obtained a house in the country on the terms of paying a quarter's rent in advance. This was 'Mavis Bush' at Lasswade near Polton; a neat if unpretentious cottage not far from that house which Walter Scott so loved in his earlier married days. The children with increasing age and experience had taken matters into their own hands with practical common sense and put an end to the humiliating and uncomfortable position which they had so long held at Holyrood. They were henceforth to lead a healthier life. Lasswade was to be De Quincey's nominal home until the end. It would have been well for him if he had seen his way to joining the family in the new house. But the old reasons were valid. He could not desert his papers at McIndoe's; the new house was small, and he could not find in it his needed quiet; he must be near his editors — all good reasons, no doubt. So he lingered on in Edinburgh. The only inconvenience that he suffered in this removal of his family, was that he lost the use of his children as messengers. 'The children being 6 or 8 miles out of town, I have no messenger.' This is an oft repeated complaint. But on the whole, the removal proved a great blessing, even to him.

During the stay at McIndoe's, De Quincey made the acquaintance of a young man who later became well known in the Scottish church, W. B. Robertson, a cousin of McIndoe or his wife. He was a keen youth and came to know and to

<sup>17</sup> Bl. MSS.; 10 June 1840.

<sup>18</sup> Bl. MSS.; 26 June 1840.



**PLATE VI. MAVIS BUSH COTTAGE**  
**LASSWADE**  
As it stands today, essentially unchanged



value the mysterious little man occupying the bedroom in his cousin's house. The acquaintance 'led him into a new world of thought and speculation.' From De Quincey, he used to declare in later years, he gained more than from all his teachers in his theological studies. From De Quincey also he received the desire to study for a year in German Universities, in much conversation about Christianity and its evidences. He was a welcome visitor through lonely months, and he seems to have been regarded with something like warm friendship. At least, later on, when De Quincey was in Glasgow, the Opium Eater actually accepted an invitation to visit Robertson in Ayreshire. 'Without sending notice,' Robertson's biographer relates, 'the Opium Eater arrived one day at the minister's lodgings when the minister was far from home. The landlady, an old maid, very particular in her habits, was shocked at the aspect of the visitor, and still more when he insisted on being shown in, that he might wait until Mr. Robertson returned the next day. The old lady who took him for a wandering vagrant, refused point blank, and would not even let him cross the threshold to write a line to Dr. Robertson saying that he had called.' The biographer closes the story with the report of an 'indignant note' later sent to Robertson; but one is safe in believing that the indignation was ironical.

Another anecdote not without its essence of truth comes from the McIndoe years in the same biography of Robertson—an anecdote recalled by Robertson's younger sister. She related in later life how as a child she was on a visit to her relatives on Princes Street and regarded with awe the closed door of the man behind it who put forth his hands to receive his meals. The servants frightened her by reporting that 'the last body who went into the room was put up the lum, (chimney) and never came out.' And once when she was playing with the man's little daughter, Emily, the door of the dreaded room opened softly and the gentle voice was heard. Emily said, 'It's you he wants.' But the child ran screaming into the kitchen and hid behind the servant. Emily followed her, dragged her back to the door and pushed her in. Miss Robertson recalled, in telling the story, the appearance of the

room completely littered with papers, and the awful 'lum.' But the strange man spoke to her kindly. 'I do not wish to frighten you, my dear; but only to ask whether your name is *Robertson*, *Robison*, or *Robinson*.'

Thus was De Quincey living at 113 Princes Street, seen by the accident of time with unusual vividness. He was waging a bitter fight in which debts only gained a firmer hold upon him; unable to escape the grip of the dreadful McIndoe; suffering the utmost pangs of poverty, even to the extent of cold and hunger; and already feeling the evil effects of the deprivation of proper food and clothing,<sup>10</sup> which a few months later were to bring upon him an avalanche of physical affliction such as he had never known.

<sup>10</sup> In June 1840 he wrote to Blackwood that ill health was interfering with his work, that he was unable to sleep and that his judgment was impaired. On July 17 his eyes were troubling him so that he even feared the loss of sight, an affliction which apparently lasted for some weeks. These are but indications of the illnesses to follow in the next spring.

## CHAPTER XIX

### GLASGOW

1841-1843

#### I

**B**Y MARCH 1841 the flight from McIndoe was a *fait accompli*.<sup>1</sup> De Quincey was in Glasgow, triumphant for the brief moment, a 'free man.' How the flight was actually brought about we shall never know. One can only imagine the deliberate plotting, the abandonment of plan after plan. He was an experienced fugitive, from the days when he eloped from the Manchester Grammar School on that famous mid-summer morning, to those of the less romantic evasions of Edinburgh duns. He must always have been in such emergencies tremulous, furtive, dilatory, until the right moment. To be sure, he was not a prisoner at 113 Princes Street; only in so far as that precious part of himself, his papers and books, was tenable by his rapacious landlord. The problem was not how to walk out himself merely, but how to walk out with his most precious property; to find a moment when the McIndoes should be sleeping or on a journey; to secure a carrier and perhaps suborn a servant. But the moment *was* found, events synchronized, and he walked forth. The 'papers with a few rare volumes (Giordano Bruno—about 8 separate works, with one almost equally rare) made a load for the porter.'<sup>2</sup> He gained the railway-station, and in Glasgow became the

<sup>1</sup> Lushington first met De Quincey in Glasgow on March 14; 'He had then, I think, not been long in Glasgow.' MS. letter of Lushington to Mrs. Baird-smith in my possession. Japp (p. 237) misprints the date March 4.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Shadworth H. Hodgson in *Outcast Essays*, p. 30, says that he had seen a copy of G. Bruno's *De Monade Numero et Figura*, 12mo., 1591 among De Quincey's books with a note on the fly-leaf: — 'Bought this day, Wednesday, May 31st, 1809; brought home this evening 8 and 9 o'clock.' Mr. Hodgson goes on: — 'I am told by one who knew him well that in later years this same little book was his frequent companion; that he would pace up and down with it in his hand, repeating from it and referring to it.'

Before he left McIndoe's, De Quincey had sent to Robert Blackwood to keep for him the Augustan History, edited by Salmasius, folio. (Bl. MSS.; 7 June 1841.)

guest of J. P. Nichol, professor of astronomy at the University.

De Quincey had met Professor Nichol some years before at a dinner at the house of Mrs. Crowe.<sup>3</sup> 'The little man came very late, dressed in a rusty suit of black. In the drawing room after dinner, he and Dr. Nichol stood together in a corner, engaged in talk; when in a slow, measured voice, De Quincey said to his new acquaintance, "Dr. Nichol, can you lend me two-pence?"'<sup>4</sup> The imagination must fill in the rest — the conversation about the stars, the Glasgow observatory; the invitation by Professor Nichol to visit him sometime. As De Quincey's desire to escape from his Edinburgh creditors grew, the general invitation of his new acquaintance may have determined the move towards Glasgow.<sup>5</sup>

With Nichol he was in an environment where he could write with some comfort and above all without anxiety. McIndoe and others were left behind in Edinburgh, and as yet no one of them had discovered where their victim was in hiding. He was free as to debts; there was at hand the University library for use through his faculty friends. For years in Edinburgh he had been unable to walk the streets without molestation or fear, and he had been obliged to spin all out of his own brain, or at least out of recollection of past reading. The new freedom and the new hope turned the world for a brief period into a very cheerful place. 'Henceforwards Blackwood may rely upon regular and most punctual communication.'

But Nichol's house was very small; and unexpected events made it an impossible asylum for long. On March 16 suddenly arrived a series of splendid instruments for the new observatory just completed for the university. Great confusion arose in the professor's quarters; for the instruments had to be taken into his house for safe keeping. And De Quincey found himself clearly in the way. So he took advantage of an invita-

<sup>3</sup> Japp, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> George Birkbeck Hill in his *Talks about Autographs*, p. 99. Hill heard this anecdote from Nichol's son.

<sup>5</sup> In a letter to Blackwood (Bl. MSS.) dated 12 April 1841, De Quincey spoke of the expenses of an inn. It would seem probable, therefore, that he put up at an inn before getting into touch with Nichol and receiving the definite invitation which carried him to Nichol's house.

tion which he had received from Mr. Lushington, the professor of Greek, to transfer himself to his rooms.<sup>6</sup> This is the first we hear of Lushington, the hospitable and friendly, Lushington of the Tennyson connexions. His friendship was to last far beyond this Glasgow period. He is an attractive figure as we catch occasional glimpses of him now and then. It was with Lushington that De Quincey stayed for some three weeks during the spring.

Lushington's kindness was soon put to a real test; for the result of De Quincey's opium, unhygienic mode of living, lack of exercise, anxieties, and privations during the preceding years promptly appeared in illness. On the very first evening, as Professor Lushington and De Quincey were sitting down to dinner, De Quincey was seized with a violent affliction, inflammatory and connected with strong delirium, which for many subsequent days prostrated him in an infant state of helplessness. On March 30 he was not yet wholly recovered.

By April 12 he had taken lodgings 'opposite the gate of the Professors' Court in the old College' in the High Street; but by June, he was established with a family by the name of Youille at 39 Renfield Street, near by. Youille was a 'college officer' on £40 a year, a 'trustworthy man,' an 'intelligent man'; and his family was kindly to the extent of real self-sacrifice and forbearance towards their strange and unfortunate lodger, until De Quincey's debts to them grew so heavy that the weight was more than they could bear; and then, Mr. Youille became in turn another McIndoe.

When De Quincey moved to Renfield Street, he was still ill, and was worried about himself. Three months later he wrote to Blackwood, 'Parlatory investigations . . . have shown that low typhus always attends a diet too attenuated and poor when long pursued — and also a general tendency to illness without apparent cause.' He was doubtless thinking here of the final illness of his wife and her death, due no doubt to the same 'attenuated and poor diet too long pursued.' 'The

<sup>6</sup> Bl. MSS.; letter of 30 March 1841. The letters quoted in this chapter are almost all from the Bl. MSS. and may be assumed to be so unless otherwise indicated.



ravages made in my own health by severe privations through the last 2 years have unfolded some of these mysteries to me. Out of 90 days or so since I left Edinburgh, not 20 have been free of fever. . . . The root lies in my last *biennium*. Were it not for my excessive temperance, I should have long since been dead. As it is, I despond at times with regard to the power of making head against the strength of a tendency now so settled. . . . But the sum is — that when I cease writing you may conclude that I am in fever, probably in delirium, and unable to rise from bed.’<sup>7</sup>

About the first of December 1841, there descended upon him the terrible affliction of erysipelas — ‘Erysipelas in both legs, accompanied by far greater pains than in former cases. . . . The pain is continually worse: but as it more and more gathers and insulates itself about the morning, — I begin to find an opening for writing in the evening.’<sup>8</sup> And a few days later, on December 18, he wrote to Lushington, ‘I am in fact quite helpless . . . I cannot make you understand the total collapse of energy, and the dire mountainous effort in doing anything which requires a *new commencement*. — To show you that it operates as powerfully in cases against myself, — I may mention that already on last Friday’ — he was writing on the Friday following — ‘I had become satisfied of the necessity for calling in some medical advice. Yet simply the writing a note (2½ lines it turned out) was so repulsive a labour that not till yesterday did I accomplish it. Laudanum renews its worst action whenever any state of low spirits is called out by pain or fever.’

His illness was really serious, and ten months later during a recurrence of the erysipelas, his physician ‘expected for some days that mortification would take place in the right leg.’ To Mrs. Youille the doctor declared ‘that it was the worst case of Purpura which he had seen in his Hospital experience.’<sup>9</sup> De Quincey slowly recovered, only to be overtaken by another relapse — ‘a shocking relapse, almost fear-

<sup>7</sup> June 7, 1841.

<sup>8</sup> Bl. MSS.; 14 December 1841. He had had an attack of erysipelas in June 1836 or 1837, I think. MS. letter of that presumable date in my possession addressed to J. J. Smith.

<sup>9</sup> 22 January 1842.

ful to me to look back upon for the extremity of the tortures. I had *Tic. Doul.* 2 years in succession 21 and 22 years ago. Even that was not worse than last week.'

Purpura was bad enough — bad enough alone; but the physical depression caused laudanum 'to renew its worst action,' namely, almost literally to paralyse the bowels. Ordinary doses of Seidlitz powders were in vain. On March 11, 'after 6 seidl. powders, I am again in force (that I did not kill myself was owing chiefly, I bel. to my taking no liquor and hardly anything else).' But Seidlitz powders cost money — 6d. a dose; — and he had nothing, either for medicines prescribed, or oranges required, or powders, or for paper and pens for the purpose of earning money. For periods of six, even ten days, he suffered from stoppage of all action of the system. And this complaint became recurrent through all his Glasgow months. What wonder that there fell upon him 'despondency and cloud on the brain,' aggravated by returning pains of purpura and want of nutriment; having, as he wrote on the 11th of March, 'been obliged to renounce his slender dinner on the same ground as compelled me to forbear applying to my landlady for the medicine.' And he summed up: — 'I do really think that not many men could have struggled at all.'

Actual suffering was intensified by imagination, picturing worse calamities resulting. 'Inflammation of the bowels, apoplexy' — these he believed might follow. He was well read in medical possibilities; given to studying his symptoms and worrying about them. But the result was other than he feared. 'Sudden rheumatism, so acute that for 60 hours last week and 40 this week, I could not so much as move in bed, but had to be supported in any change.'<sup>10</sup>

Poverty and illness, cause and effect; a perpetual round of mutual evil. On 3 May 1842: — 'I am satisfied that I shall be attacked again in the same way within 6 weeks; unless only I can devise some means of procuring an *animal* diet. This want is the ruin of my system. . . . 'My difficulties it is not possible to express. By 6 in the evening, I am always asleep from pure weakness: wakened up, or trying strong

coffee, I only make matters worse by spoiling the next day. Thus my chief, my prosperous time of composition as it used to be, is quite gone. And so great is the debility, even after a long night's sleep, that unless I can devise some remedy for the 2 main evils I suffer, too certainly there is an end of me and all my efforts.' <sup>11</sup> But he was not entirely discouraged. It was *not* 'a breaking up of the constitution. . . . I upon the whole do not think so.'

During the following winter for eight weeks he lay stretched in helplessness, with a recurrence of the dread purpura. In March 1843 'a slight day's work prostrates' him. But the exhaustion was *now* a little relieved. Then came a new affliction — 'the pains of gout.' His feet shrink 'from the touch of a muslin handkerchief;' but a greater affliction is 'that deadly languishing from blood continually growing more torpid.' <sup>12</sup> For twenty-seven months he endured monotonous suffering.

## II

As soon as he had reached Glasgow he planned for 'at least a dozen [articles] in succession' — three of them to be finished for Blackwood immediately, namely, *A Sketch of Niebuhr*; a paper on a *Great Danger which seems to impend over Western Civilization at this period*; and an *Abstract from the Memoirs of Arndt*; 'the two former all but finished.' The first Blackwood received next day. The *Abstract from Arndt* followed in April, 'Russia in the Summer and Winter of 1812;' passages from Arndt, 'equal to any in the *Plague of Athens* as reported by Thucydides.' Yet for some reason it seems never to have been printed.<sup>13</sup>

Through June 1841, he wrote his papers on Homer and the Homeridae, a series immediately inspired, doubtless, by conversations with Lushington, discussing Wolfian views as to the unity of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It cost him 'more reading and of books the most confused than any others he ever wrote.' In a later letter he spoke of five or six books in this connexion! But at least he had the joy of laying his hands

<sup>11</sup> 1 June 1842.

<sup>12</sup> 19 March 1843.

<sup>13</sup> 28 April 1841.

on books once more, confused and confusing as they might be.<sup>14</sup>

The worried summer of 1841 was also the time for working up a political article on *English Foreign Policy* with which he had been wrestling for months. But it would not come off. Yet he sent in a portion to show his editor that he had been making an honest effort. But, alas, in his shaken state of nerves and body he had done Blackwood 'no service as he hoped.' 'You are quite right, in what you say with so much kindness and delicacy,' he wrote to Blackwood (1 April 1842), 'as to the weak windings-up of many amongst my papers. This did not arise, as seems natural to suppose, from haste.'

Often his time was wasted; and he knew it, and he wanted Blackwood to know it. 'One thing I must especially guard against — the idea I am thus seeking *faire valoir* the substance of any part of my imperfect art, in the course of preparation at the moment of my arrest by illness. On reviewing it within the last days, I find that it will not do. In fact, I must have been enfeebled in power and judgment before the illness commenced. It wants energy, and to such a point I think you must have rejected it, even if finished.' It was his article on Peele.

There were other interruptions; a fire in a shop immediately below his rooms, with 'smouldering smoke issuing for some hours; ' with a possible explosion of gas; with the necessity of moving furniture from the rooms, together with his papers, a sheet of which, of course, got lost. A trifle. But 'vexation added to a total interruption of 7 hours brought back my Purpura!' To him who hath shall be given. And when he had been at work for some time upon a review of Muir's book, appeared reviews in both the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh Review*. And he admitted that after them, his own work would seem 'dull and poor.' 'But what could I do without a single book to assist me in framing topics? For one sole book from the college lib. I have been obliged to give up, unused, on Mr. Lushington's departure.' Even with Lushington's help, he was hampered as to books; for in an

<sup>14</sup> The articles on Homer, etc., were printed in the October, November and December issues of *Blackwood's*, 1841.

earlier letter he had exclaimed, 'It is really shocking for me to think of my practical imprisonment. In the Advocates' Lib. or Brit. Museum—heavens! what use I should make of the wealth around me. As it is, I really know not which way to turn. And when I look on the books—hardly 6 through the last 5 years that I have had, my wonder is—how I have kept afloat at all.' <sup>15</sup>

There were political articles, built, as it would seem to us, on slender foundations; a somewhat slight amount of casual newspaper information, wrapped round with settled theory and subtle reflection. De Quincey did not see even the daily papers regularly. 'Last night,' he wrote on 12 October 1841, as if it were a not usual event. 'I have seen the Papers through the aid of my intelligent landlord; viz., the *Globe* and the *Times*—both for Thursday last, both for Friday last.'—He was writing on Tuesday—'Consequently I am master of the facts.' Then he suggested that if he were to continue to write political articles, he would best receive papers daily, or some weekly giving the despatches; 'for,' he complained, 'generally the daughters of the family, my sole aid in such cases, bring some 2 or 3 days-a-week paper (as the *Courier*) in which often missing the right No. which is perhaps irrecoverable, one misses the only thing one wanted.'

Certainly all he sent to Blackwood was not accepted. He was often hasty, or late, or diffuse; and through all his needs he never complained of his treatment. Yet sometimes articles were sent in with statements of his condition, which to a tougher man than Robert Blackwood must have acted as an appeal not easily turned down. I suspect, that some of the papers sent in and never published, were actually paid for, even though I have no direct evidence of the fact.<sup>16</sup> But when a letter arrived with such a sentence as this:—'This paper if

<sup>15</sup> 30 June 1842.

<sup>16</sup> James Bertram, *Some Memories of Books, Authors and Events*, 1893, p. 64 gives indirect evidence as to this in regard to Tait. 'There should be a considerable number of Mr. De Quincey's unpublished articles in existence, somewhere, because he wrote much manuscript that was never printed. I am writing of what I know when I say there would be, in the year 1844-5, ten or twelve papers in Mr. Tait's possession that had not been used. There were broken-off "continuations" and other contributions laid aside to be used when opportunity should offer.'

rejected will be fatal to all my attempts at keeping my ground,' (24 November 1841); or, 'I have been reduced to the last gasp. And Latterly I have bought no one of the medicines prescribed' (22 January 1842); it must have been a satisfaction to Mr. Blackwood to be able to pay generously for it. As a matter of fact, both papers accompanying the sentences just quoted were accepted and printed in *Maga*, the one on Herodotus appearing in January 1842, the other on *Pagan Oracles* in March.

During these many months of illness, De Quincey was fertile in suggestion for subjects. In March 1841, he had planned at least a dozen papers in succession, although, of course, no dozen papers appeared. In the following January, he had four more to propose — on Cicero as a conservative statesman in relation to the Conservatives of England; on Ricardo simplified — a subject he could never get away from; on Style, entirely recomposed and a very different paper from the one already printed; on a bird's eye view of the gloomy revolutions possibly at hand in Europe. And a week later he was reading hard for a paper on Maritime Law of European Nations.<sup>17</sup>

In his solitary lodgings, De Quincey had definite thoughts about the drift of current ideas and movements. In moments of comfortable calm he wrote at length to his publisher, discussing the Corn Laws or the situation of affairs in Afghanistan. His mind was on the whole alert and clear. His comments were undoubtedly written for the purpose of convincing Robert Blackwood that he was ready to write wisely and well those political articles which he found particularly easy to turn off; and that his ideas were in real harmony with the conservative policy of *Maga*.

### III

ILLNESS was not his only handicap; there were also *Debts*. Even though he was in Glasgow and out of the reach of Edinburgh creditors, he was haunted by thoughts of McIndoe raging along Princes Street, and of others angry and momentarily thwarted. Hardly had he arrived in Glasgow when De Quin-

<sup>17</sup> 22 January 1842.

cey wrote that he expected McIndoe to lodge an arrest early in Mr. Blackwood's hands — a futile gesture, to be sure, since McIndoe did not know where De Quincey was and Blackwood would not tell. De Quincey could think of the probability with a certain satisfaction. 'What to do eventually under that case, I will consider,' he meditated. 'But *that* is for the future.' Certainly the present refuge must be kept secret. 'Address under cover, if you please, to Professor Nichol, College, Glasgow. But do not place my name at all on the *outside* cover.' Glasgow was safe so long as he was lost in it; and it remained safe for more than two years — safe, that is, from the creditors of Edinburgh.

But his debts were still active in Edinburgh. Hardly had he settled in Glasgow before the court records in Auld Reekie began to show protests. It made De Quincey highly nervous lest he be discovered. In June he had a slight panic. 'A serious thing to me is this — that some hand (evidently *not* yours)' — he was writing to Robert Blackwood — 'had addressed the letter simply "College, Glasg." My name was in your hand; the rest in a strange hand. Now, if this plain notification of my being in Glasg. were pursued, it is quite impossible that I could escape arrest for many weeks.'<sup>18</sup> But the secret was kept, although creditors had discovered that he could be communicated with through Lasswade, a fact which harassed his elder daughter.

He *wanted* to pay. In mid-April 1841, a little debt in Edinburgh of 10s. was so urgent, and under his shocking depression he had so neglected it, that he sent off his last farthing which he had kept in reserve. A week later he was 'literally obliged' to send a letter 'without a stamp or Q's head'<sup>19</sup> — not from carelessness, but because he had nothing left. His 'anxiety about his children' had led him to strip himself of everything. He was even without paper; he had been so for a fortnight. But paper he 'can borrow of Professor Lushington.'<sup>20</sup> He *must* pay a baker's bill in Lasswade, even if he goes without medicine.<sup>21</sup> But he cannot pay the Youilles. That family 'tho' kind and liberal, have long exceeded their *means*

<sup>18</sup> 7 June 1841.

<sup>19</sup> 12 April 1841.

<sup>20</sup> 23 April 1841.

<sup>21</sup> 22 October 1841.

of credit.' In November, 'They are absolutely exhausted.' His personal privations are nothing to him; 'it is the pressure of strangers' that hurts. 'It is often too shocking to witness the struggle between their good nature on one side and on the other their failing power with their growing vexation.' He became more desperate. On 25 November 1841, on a fragment of an envelope he wrote, 'I am in the situation of a man holding on by his hands to the burning deck of a ship. With difficulty indeed I can keep my position even for 24 hours.' And he closed, 'This is the *End*.' Of course it wasn't. Blackwood sent him £10 for an article; and all was again hopeful.

Amongst the Edinburgh creditors was our old friend, Miss Miller of Holyrood Gardens — one of the few for whom he had some consideration. Almost his first note from Glasgow requested Blackwood to divide his pay for his sketch of Niebuhr into two parts; one for his children, one for Miss Miller. The real reason of his concern was the old fact that he had left a lot of papers and books in her care and he was afraid lest they might be sequestered and sold if he did not keep her placated. Certainly, in some way she knew of his plans to escape from the McIndoes. On 15 March 1841, soon after his arrival in Glasgow, he had written to her that he had 'accomplished an object which Miss Miller would understand without further explanation'; and he continued, 'as soon as he affects such an arrangement with Princes Street as to make it safe to come within the Abbey — that is, within a month at farthest — he will return to resume his rooms at Miss Miller's.' <sup>22</sup> I am afraid that this promise arose not so much from the love of Miss Miller or the Abbey, as from a desire to keep her hopeful.

In September, furthermore, Miss Miller and her attorney, Mr. Rogers, actually went to Glasgow to see De Quincey. They went in a gentle mood, although the purpose was *inter alia* to discuss money. They were friendly about it, neither 'choosing to assume that offensive character of a persecuting dun in which Mr. McIndoe made himself so annoying.' I do not know what she gained in cash and promises by the visit;

<sup>22</sup> Letter in the possession of the Misses Masson.



but she had another object in mind, namely, that De Quincey should use his influence among his great friends to help her brother-in-law to obtain a small position in the post-office. Mr. Walker had been a lieutenant in the cavalry — the 11th Light Dragoons — but had sold out, married, and had been overcome by a cloud of embarrassments. Did Mr. De Quincey know Sir Edward Lees, Mr. Gibson Craig or Mr. Macaulay? Unfortunately the first two, not at all, or in a purely formal way. With Mr. Macaulay he had had 'the very slight connexion of having been a *collaborateur* in Charles Knight's *Quarterly Journal*, and this might naturally bring them sometimes into company with the whole band of contributors.' But he did not know him well enough to ask favours. De Quincey was, however, willing to ask Mr. Robert Blackwood's help as 'a great kindness to himself.' And we have a letter to Blackwood as another piece of evidence of the readiness with which he was always eager to help when he could.<sup>23</sup>

On the whole the Edinburgh creditors troubled him little. But on 12 June 1842, the phantom of McIndoe suddenly reappeared in a hasty note. 'If (which I have some reason to fear) Mr. McIndoe or anybody from him should call on you, — then were he shewn for one moment into your private room, and lying on the ground or on the table should be one of my envelopes — he wd. thus learn at once my address so far as general *place* is concerned.' So began the letter with sudden fear; followed three days later by a very long letter full of anxieties and legal queries. It is a document with heavily *printed* captions, dividing it into sections: — 'PERILS FROM CREDITORS. First: 2 separate creditors have written to me within the last 4 weeks and *one* of them in a way to alarm me — viz., Miss Mary Miller and Mr. Rogers

<sup>23</sup> As another bit of evidence of De Quincey's constant willingness to help friends or friends of friends, I may cite a letter of 30 January 1846 (for sale by Messrs. Elkin Matthews, Ltd. in April 1928), in which he gives an account of his effort to help the election of Mr. Goodsir to the professorship of Anatomy at the University of Edinburgh. He called upon Mr. Tait, the publisher, and stirred him to call upon members of the Town Council on Mr. Goodsir's behalf. De Quincey was ready to call also upon Mr. C. B. Tait.

In this connexion, I may mention his letter in 1852 on behalf of Professor Ferrier when he was also standing for a professorship, now preserved in The Advocates Library of Edinburgh. See W. E. Axon's article on *De Quincey and Ferrier* in the *Manchester Quarterly*, 1898.)

on acc't. of Miss M. Miller; these in the first place: and almost simultaneously Mr. McIndoe.' Naturally De Quincey wrote Miss Miller of his illness, and had no fears but that she would be reasonable. But he had different feelings about Mr. McIndoe. 'As to Mr. McInd., with far less claim upon me, I dread most nervously a worse result. I answered him briefly through my daughter — (desiring her to copy out the passage as a message sent through her) — to this effect: that, upon receiving a *complete* statement of his claim, such as hitherto I had never been able to obtain, and a counterstatement of all the sums paid from time to time, — I wd. take measures for the discharge of the whole. This demand I had hoped might furnish a good demur for months: unhappily it was *now* instantly complied with; nearly a month ago. And since then, since a fortnight ago, he has written a letter through Lasswade manifesting some impatience. In fact, I believe it is his poverty which urges him on.' Is this comedy or farce?

At hand, the Youilles were daily, hourly in his sight. They had borne with him through his illness, they had advanced money now and then for medicine; but their means were small. On 1 June 1842 he wrote, 'It is no imputation on the worthy people with whom I lodge that they grow anxious under too long a credit. It is not that they distrust, or show any want of delicacy; but they really cannot go beyond a certain point.' Now and then he paid on account; as on June 15, at a moment of dire need, due to the death of a Youille daughter of bronchitis. But, on November 4, he had paid them nothing for ten weeks, so that, 'for some time' they and he were 'in the very extremities of difficulty. Unfortunately I am not known and have no credit — not the smallest — except through them. They on the other hand have none but what may be imagined in a £40 Servant or official of the college.' And in May 1843, he seemed to the Youilles 'in a position of doubtful solvency.' So was it, that on May 22; Mr. Youille at last gave him notice to leave. Once more, on May 31, the ultimatum was repeated; 'that if on Thursday, June 1, i.e. to-morrow, I could not pay up an arrear still standing against my name [and in a deleted passage, 'not great for an accumulation of two years'] — well and good: if not, that on this day

I must take my departure. That is easily said: but in what direction or how to do so, is past my guess. . . . Probably I shall keep my footing till Friday the 2nd.' He did not pay up his arrears; and soon after the first of June he left the Youilles and Glasgow, abandoning his books and papers as surety. He was still paying or promising to pay on the debt in the next year.<sup>24</sup>

## IV

His worries were not only for himself. There was his family at Lasswade to consider. Francis was with Mr. Kelsall in Manchester and looking after himself.<sup>25</sup> Horace was in the army. At home were three daughters and Paul Fred. They were all prudent, but they were short of means. Once they were tided over a bad four days by the sale of a work in five volumes which had been given to De Quincey, the money helping towards meeting a baker's bill and some arrears of taxes.<sup>26</sup> He constantly sent them by far the larger share of his earnings. Even so, 'all the lesser trades people have been butting at my children thro the last week for arrears of bills.' <sup>27</sup>

Suddenly, out of a clear sky, came word on 30 June 1841, from the surgeon at Lasswade that his eldest daughter, Margaret, had twice had a hemorrhage; 'if it came a third time it would be fatal.' De Quincey was terribly shaken by this news; he was helpless at a distance, fearing the worst. Five days passed, and there was no recurrence. Yet he could not write, he could not sleep, and finally his understanding forsook him. In spite of better news, he was still anxious on September 26. For some reason he had again been thrown into a nervous panic. 'This child will die, I foresee, under the misery of her situation. For she has no firmness to face it; — is entirely guiltless of wrong: and I, unless I can do something effectual and sudden, shall feel myself in part the cause.'

<sup>24</sup> 5 September 1843. Letter to Lushington, 22 January 1844.

<sup>25</sup> The son of the Mr. Kelsall of early Manchester days had offered to take one of the De Quincey boys into his store out of gratitude for the Quincey family's treatment of his father.

<sup>26</sup> 28 April 1842.

<sup>27</sup> 2 September 1842.

And what was more, he foresaw another illness for himself, like that of the preceding June-July. This melancholy letter is full of fear; and the original is much corrected and shaky in hand-writing, almost illegible in places — a thing unusual for De Quincey whose normal script was clear and firm.

Margaret did not die. But her father was always anticipating bad news. He wrote to Blackwood 15 June 1842, 'Finally about my children, I am so much alarmed that I really have not ventured to open a letter received yesterday after a long interval from my daughter: because any letter too painful or alarming would absolutely incapacitate me from closing my Polit. paper with effect: whilst no good would result to *them*. In my own difficulties from a three months' interruption I read *theirs*.' On another occasion (9 October 1842) he had not the courage to open a letter from Lasswade from the Thursday when he received it until the following Sunday — a letter, as it turned out, of good news. Such was the state of his nerves; such was the cloud of tremulous fears which made those months so dark. Yet in spite of all, the letters leave an impression, not of hopelessness, but rather, on the whole, of courage; of the will to struggle and overcome.

During the twenty-seven months in Glasgow, he was visited by his two sons — by Horatio soon after De Quincey's arrival, while he was still the guest of Professor Lushington; by Francis in May 1843. Horatio entered the 26th (Cameronian) Regiment on 30 April 1841 as an ensign; on a commission purchased for him by his grandmother. In December he was ordered to China where, on 27 August 1842, he died. In the spring of 1841 before he left to join his regiment, he visited his father for some days. There were many matters to be talked over. The official correspondence after Horace's death gives details. From it we learn that the cost of outfitting the young man was £700, a sum partly paid by his grandmother and partly by his father; and another £200 was paid by De Quincey himself, a fact almost transcending belief. And in addition, upon his son's death, he was obliged to assume his son's debts after the effects had been sold, of about £75. Although there is no record of De Quincey's sorrow at the loss

of his son, it must have added further shadow to those dark months.<sup>28</sup>

As De Quincey's days in Glasgow drew to an end, Francis went to see his father. He had been working in Manchester, and now for some reason, he had come to the conclusion that a mercantile life was not for him. He stopped in Glasgow on his way home to Lasswade, on 2 May 1843, and was the greatest help to his father in his weakness, cheering him in the melancholy situation in which he was of being an unwelcome lodger with the Youilles. 'Without his aid,' De Quincey wrote to Blackwood, 'I never could have separated the papers from the masses of others with which by long lying about they had got confounded.' Francis probably stayed on until De Quincey took his final departure and then helped him on the journey to Lasswade.

## V

SOLITARY, sick, and dunned, De Quincey must have been largely a hermit in Glasgow; although there were no reasons, apart from illness, for him to remain imprisoned in his rooms. He had friends — Nichol and Lushington, and probably others; we hear vaguely of a Mr. Muir, a Mr. Ramsay, a Mr. Urquhart, a Mr. Monteith.<sup>29</sup> They doubtless looked in upon him now and then; they probably invited him to their houses when he was able to go forth. Professor Nichol's son recalls delightful occasional walks with De Quincey to the observatory.<sup>30</sup> But almost perpetual illness left little opportunity for going out or visiting. Evidence is small of social activity; yet there are a few notes to Lushington implying invitations to dinner, calls, loans of books, either Lushington's own or, through him, books from the college library. That there are not other records of his Glasgow acquaintance proves next to nothing at all; but solitude, from the nature of the case, must have been largely his lot.

There is one note to Lushington which is more than usually interesting, in that it reflects a certain self-confessed character-

<sup>28</sup> *Notes and Queries*, Series XII, 9 October 1915. Note by E. H. Fairbrother.

<sup>29</sup> 28 April 1841.

<sup>30</sup> Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 61.

istic of mind; his unreadiness to meet crises and to make instant decisions.

Thursd. Morn'g. October 28 [1841].  
but, for an hour or so no messenger

My dear Sir,

Amongst my infirmities is this — that I have no presence of mind when the business is to summon one's thoughts about one *instantly*. Witness the following fact — that whenever in times past any man had vexed me, so that it became advisable to wound him in return with a 3-pronged sarcasm, — always by the time my sarcasm was ready for use, the villain had fled, or the occasion gone by. This was the reason that I could not remember, whilst you staid, that particular call on my exertions (is *emergency* too fine a word?) which obscurely I knew to be awaiting me. It was moving behind clouds in my mind, but would not shine out. One hour after you went it did. It is — that Mr. Rob. Blackwood, the great authority in such cases, seldom reads MSS. except on a Sunday. Consequently to finish or *not* to finish by Friday night, makes, or may make, the difference of a week. By Wednesday I shall have heard from him. But in any result after that day I will make no further demurs to your kindness on the ground which I urged yesterday; satisfied from your manner that I may rely on your Sister's pardoning anything too neglected or outré in my costume.

Yours ever,  
Thomas De Quincey.<sup>81</sup>

On November 19 he again postponed another invitation; but we have Lushington's word for it that he *did* dine once with him towards the end of 1841.<sup>82</sup>

In May 1843, there was a pleasant incident in the visit of Charles Knight, the last occasion on which the two men met. Knight records that 'Nothing could exceed the affection with which he received me. He looked better than he had done twelve years before,' when Knight had seen him in Edinburgh. 'He had a beard a foot long (an unusual appendage to the face of an Englishman twenty years ago), the cultivation of which, he said, was necessary to his health'; perhaps for warmth, but more probably because for months he had found shaving impossible.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> BS. MSS.

<sup>82</sup> Japp, p. 237.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Knight, *Passages of a Working Life*, II, 306.

There was another incident during these years which may be put on the pleasant side of the ledger, namely, an invitation from Robert Blackwood to have his portrait painted by Mr. Loder for the Blackwood collection at 45 George Street. His eldest daughter was eager to have him go to Edinburgh to sit for it; and De Quincey, flattered, would have been willing to do so except for the danger from creditors, the complaint of his feet, want of money, and 'miscellaneous provisional arrangement with the house,' in which he was resident. Yet, nevertheless, he would have gone, but for the return of purpura as the result of trying on a shoe. Next summer, however, he would be glad to sit for Mr. Loder, 'either in London or anywhere else.'<sup>84</sup> The sitting was never given.

<sup>84</sup> 9 October 1842.

## CHAPTER XX

### LASSWADE

1843-1846

#### I

**D**E QUINCEY joined his family at Mavis Bush, Lasswade, in June 1843, physically weak from his heavy illnesses in Glasgow. In January 1844 he wrote a notable letter to Lushington of his home-coming:

I was as for two years you had known me. Why, I know not, but for some cause during the summer months [of 1843] the weight of insufferable misery and mere abhorrence of life increased; but also it fluctuated. A conviction fell upon me that immense exercise might restore me. But you will imagine my horror when with that conviction, I found, precisely in my earliest efforts, my feet give way, and the misery in all its strength came back. Every prospect I had of being laid up as a cripple for life. Much and deeply I pondered on this, and I gathered myself up as if for a final effort. For if that fate were established, farewell I felt for me all hope of restoration. Eternally the words sounded in my years: 'Suffered and was buried.' Unless that one effort which I planned and determined, as often you see a prostrate horse 'biding his time' and reserving his strength for one mighty struggle, too surely I believed that for me no ray of light would ever shine again. The danger was, that at first going off on exercise the inflammation [of purpura] would come on; that if I then persisted, the inflammation would settle into the bones, and the case become desperate. It matters not to trouble you with the details — the result was this: — I took every precaution known to the surgical skill of the neighborhood. Within a measured space of forty-four yards in circuit — namely, in the little garden at Mavis Bush — 'so that forty rounds were exactly required for one mile, I had within ninety days walked a thousand miles. And so far I triumphed.<sup>1</sup>

A newly found remedy helped him to the strength for such unwonted exertion. At the end of July he had been taking iron for five weeks — iron which gave him some hope of

<sup>1</sup> BS. MSS.; Page I, 326.



restoration.<sup>2</sup> He had again a growing eagerness to be writing something. 'Misery' was for the moment in abeyance; and he fell to with renewed gusto and power. 'Two papers I *have* been writing for some time: viz. on the Prospects of Eng. Lit. and on the *Manners* of the Aristocracy. But I am aground as to any other articles from the ancient difficulty of devising subjects.' Cannot he write some reviews, he asked, of, for example, Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu Christ* which raised such a commotion upon the continent, especially in Switzerland, Russia, and elsewhere? And on August 18 he wrote again to Blackwood, 'having now so much more power to write and to *compress* what I write, it is really a relief.' If other evidence than his own words were needed, one could accept the beautiful renewed neatness of his hand-writing. Certainly the fresh feeling of control over his style was in sharp contrast to his confession of the preceding May in connexion with his *Logic of Political Economy*. 'In making the book as long as it is, you must not suppose that I wilfully did so. On the contrary, the length has acted most unhappily on myself. But I did not perceive that it could be shortened till I had finished; till I was correcting and revising it.'<sup>3</sup>

Now it was a very different story. In October he had finished a paper on Ceylon — 'finished and elaborately finished'; it was one among the first fruits of his returning health. 'I flatter myself that it is a good article; and I feel sure that your long experience in the art and tact, and one may call it the science, of examining and estimating compositions will reveal to *your* eyes that it is an art. on which much pains have been bestowed.' He called attention to certain parts 'written *expressly with a view* to effect and rhetorical impression.' Next day he again rejoiced: — 'For the first time in many years I am able to write both energetically and satisfactorily to myself.' And in July and August of that summer he had begun work on the *Suspiria*.

## II

BUT 'Misery' still paid recurrent visits to interrupt him; and he was still 'irregular as to laudanum.' But in the late sum-

<sup>2</sup> Bl. MSS.; 27 July 1843.

<sup>3</sup> Bl. MSS.; 17 May 1843.

mer or the autumn of 1843, he undertook to regulate his opium habits; and there followed a period of many months of the most overwhelming suffering and gloom. Of the early portion he gave a magnificent account in a letter to Lushington written in the spring of 1844.

'Because I still was irregular as to laudanum, this also I reformed. For six months no results; one dreary uniformity of report — absolute desolation; misery so perfect that too surely I perceived, and no longer disguised from myself, the impossibility of continuing to live under so profound a blight, I now kept my journal as one who in a desert island is come to his last day's provisions. On Friday the 23d. of February, I might say for the first time, in scriptural words, "And the man was sitting clothed and in his right mind." <sup>4</sup> That is not too strong an expression. I had known all along, and too ominously interpreted the experience from the fact, that I was not in my perfect mind.<sup>5</sup> Lunacy causes misery; the border is sometimes crossed, and too often that is the order of succession. But also misery, and above all physical misery, working by means of intellectual remembrances and persecution of thoughts, no doubt sometimes inversely causes lunacy. To that issue I felt that all things tended. You may guess, therefore, the awe that fell upon me, when, not by random accident, capable of no theory on review, but in consequence of one firm system pursued through eight months as to one element, and nearly three as to another, I recovered in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, such a rectification of the compass as I had not known for years. It is true that this frame departed from me within forty-eight hours; but that no way alarmed me — I drew hope from the omen. It is as if a man had been in a whirlpool, carried violently by a headlong current, and before he could speak or think, he was riding as if at anchor, once more dull [sic — perhaps *safe*?] and untroubled, as in days of infancy. The current caught me again; and the old sufferings in degree came back, as I have said. There is something shocking, and generally childish, by too obvious associations, in any suggestions of suicide; but too certainly I felt that to this my condition tended; for again enormous irritability was rapidly travelling over the disk of my life, and this, and the consciousness of increasing weakness, added to my desolation of heart. I felt that no man could continue to

<sup>4</sup> It is impossible to accept literally his statement that on February 23 he first emerged from *six months* of absolute desolation, when on October 12 he was glorying in the power of his style in the paper on Ceylon.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Bairdsmith writes that De Quincey was almost literally a maniac in these periods of struggle against opium. MS. letter to Findlay.

struggle. Coleridge had often spoken to me of the dying away from him of all hope; not meaning, as I rightly understood him, the hope that forms itself as a distant look out into the future, but of the gladsome vital feelings that are born of the blood, and make the goings-on of life pleasurable.

'Then I partly understood him, now perfectly; and laying all things together, I returned obstinately to the belief that laudanum was at the root of all this unimaginable hell. Why then not, if only by way of experiment, leave it off? Alas! that had become impossible. Then I descended to a hundred drops. Effects so dreadful and utterly un conjectured by medical men succeeded that I was glad to get back under shelter. Not the less I persisted; silently, surely, descended the ladder, and as I have said, suddenly found my mind as if whirled round on its true centre. A line of Wordsworth's about Germany I remembered: —

"All power was given her in the dreadful trance."

Such was my sense: illimitable seemed the powers restored to me; and now, having tried the key, and found it the true key, even though a blast of wind has blown the door to again, no jot of spirits was gone away from me: I shall rise as one risen from the dead.

'This long story I have told you, because nothing short of this could explain my conduct, past, present and future. And thus far there is an interest for all the world — that I am certain of this, viz., that misery is the talisman by which man communicates with the world outside of our fleshly world.'<sup>o</sup>

The style of this letter is literary, impassioned, and imaginative. De Quincey had written nothing like it for years. Some rebirth of will, some happier conditions of life and of health roused in him a larger and richer expression than he had long been capable of.

There are other fragments which bear the same marks. Dr. Japp quotes from 'journals' which are of this period. 'This night, Wednesday, December 25, about 7 P.M., has first solemnly revealed itself to me that I am and have long been under a curse [q. the opium curse?], all the greater for being physically and by effort endurable, and for hiding itself, i.e. playing in and out from all offices of life at every turn of every moment. Oh, dreadful! by degrees infinitely worse than leprosy — than — . But oh, what signifies the rhetoric of a

case so sad! Conquer it I must by exercise unheard of, or it will conquer me.' <sup>7</sup>

And in another passage, De Quincey went on to elaborate his sufferings. 'Did you ever read of leprosy as it existed in Judea, or — and that was worse — as it existed in Europe during the dark ages? Did you ever read of that tremendous visitation in the early days of Judaism, when, if the poor patient would have hushed up his misery in silence, the walls of his house whispered of his whereabouts. Horrible! that a man's own chamber — the place of his refuge and retreat — should betray him! . . . Not fear or terror, but inexpressible misery, is the last portion of the opium-eater. At certain stages it is not so. We know of a man called X — who has often jumped out of bed — bounced like a column of quicksilver — at midnight, fallen on his knees and cried out, while the perspiration ran down his wasted face, and his voice waked all the house, "O Jesus Christ, be merciful to me a sinner!" — so unimaginable had been the horror which sleep opened to his eyes. Such is for some time its effect. But generally in its later stages, it is not horror, it is not fear: all these are swallowed up in misery.'

There is one other fragment bearing upon this same period and mood to serve as background and comment upon the *Suspiria*; a letter to Miss Mitford. De Quincey was full of apology for not having replied to one of her letters. He had written to her; he had written twice. But his letters had been lost among his papers; and finally a daughter had taken up the burden of replying for him. But she had been unable to give the *reasons* for his silence; she *could* not give them, for she was not even aware of them. At last he took his pen to give them to Miss Mitford himself.

'No purpose could be answered by my vainly endeavouring to make intelligible for my daughters, what I cannot make intelligible for myself, the undecipherable horror that night and day broods over my nervous system. One effect of this is — to cause at uncertain intervals such whirlwinds of impatience as precipitate me violently, whether I will or not, into acts that would seem insanities, but are not such in fact, as my

<sup>7</sup> These 'journals' I have not been able to discover. Japp misdates this passage 1844. Wednesday, December 25, must refer to 1843. (Page, I, 329.)

understanding is never under any delusion. Whatever I may be writing becomes suddenly overspread with a dark frenzy of horror. I am using words perhaps, that are tautologic. But it is because no language can give expression to the sudden storm of frightful revelations opening upon me from some abyss of an eternity, an eternity not coming but past and irrevocable. Whatever I may have been writing is suddenly wrapt as it were in one sheet of consuming fire: the very paper is poisoned to my eyes: I cannot endure to look at it: and I sweep it away into vast piles of unfinished letters or inchoate pages begun and interrupted under circumstances the same in kind, though differing unaccountably in degree. I am always alone in my study so nobody witnesses these paroxysms: nor if they did, would my outward appearance testify to the dreadful transports within. They interpret the case so far as it is made to them by any practical result of my delay or my neglect, as indolence or caprice or distracting occupations. At the worst they put it down amongst my foibles, for which I am sure they find filial excuses. Why should I interrupt their gaiety, which all day sounds so beautifully to my ears — a gaiety which at times is so pathetic to me as the natural exhalation from their youth and their innocence, by any attempt to explain the inexplicable? Them it would sadden, and me it would in no way benefit: so I leave them always, in cases where I have failed in any promised performance, to make that excuse which the circumstances seem most to warrant.

'Meantime I foresee that your benignity, and the regard with which you honour me will prompt — as your first question — what I have done or am doing, towards the alleviation of this dreadful curse? Is there any key, you will say, to its original cause? Sincerely, I do not believe there is. One inevitable suggestion at first arose to everybody consulted, viz. that it might be some horrible recoil from the long habit of using opium to excess. But this seems improbable for more reasons than one.'<sup>8</sup>

On 22 January 1844 he was recovering from an attack more annihilating to the spirits than any he had ever experienced. On February 23 he had that sudden emergence into hope. On May 5, on the contrary, he wrote, 'by a long and determined weaning from laud., I have drawn myself down for 6 last weeks from purgatory into the shades of a deeper abyss. — Hence as to other things [writing] I am driven to the last

<sup>8</sup> BS. MSS.; Page, I, 340; but misdated 1842. It was obviously written in 1844.

gasp.'<sup>9</sup> And during the next fortnight he spoke of the 'distracted way in which the distraction of laudanum forces me to write.' In June he brought his daily dose down to six grains with the 'most significant benefit.'<sup>10</sup> Yet the 'fluctuating course' continued throughout the year, so that in November he wrote to Lushington again of 'the tremendous arrears of wrath still volleying and whirling round me from the retreating opium. Its flight is Parthian; flying it pursues.'<sup>11</sup>

## III

UNDER all difficulties he kept on writing, mostly political papers; on the O'Connell agitation; on the Conduct of the British Press; on the Irish Aristocracy; on the Scottish Free Church; on Afghanistan; on Ceylon. Some papers were completely written, some partly; some perhaps were merely suggested. But he kept busy. And in February 1844, he finished the preface to *The Logic of Political Economy* which he had been long preparing, so that the little book finally appeared in March.<sup>12</sup> Then, when this was off his hands, he made a suggestion to Blackwood which was prophetic of his later *Collected Works*, namely, that a volume of his essays should be gathered together under the title 'Corrections of History'; essays on the Essenes, the Roman Emperors, Cicero, the Byzantine Empire and others.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps under the inspiration of this scheme he turned mostly to history for a time; he reviewed Finlay's *Greece under the Emperors*, and offered to do the same for Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella*. He wrote on India and Civilization, and then produced the paper on Coleridge, suggested by Gilman's recently published life.

Meantime he found some, if rare, human associations outside his family. Soon after his return to Lasswade, Robert Blackwood went thither to call upon him, and occasionally afterwards. By the end of 1844, Lushington was expected and paid more than one visit during the next months. And

<sup>9</sup> Bl. MSS.; letter of Robert Blackwood.

<sup>10</sup> Page, I, 330.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bl. MSS.; letter of 8 February 1844 and others following.

<sup>13</sup> Bl. MSS.; letter of 6 May 1844.

we hear of a Mr. Young, the parish school-master of the village; 'intelligent, and his wife both interesting and intelligent.'<sup>14</sup> But most satisfactory of all, John Wilson the long detached, was planning to go with Mr. Blackwood to see his old friend.<sup>15</sup>

The relations between the two men will never, probably, be cleared up. After De Quincey's early years in Edinburgh, they certainly saw little of each other; and somewhere in the late '30's or early '40's there seems to have been a definite break. The biography of Wilson by his daughter is silent upon it. Japp's *De Quincey* merely hints at it. But the evidence points to it clearly; and a letter from Mrs. Bairdsmith to Mr. John Findlay in 1885 makes it certain. 'As to Professor Wilson,' she wrote, 'it seems to me an illustration of Coleridge's, "Alas, they had been friends in youth," each indebted to the other at critical periods of their improvident lives for kindly help, perhaps not admitted as generously as they might have been by Professor Wilson when he was the successful man, and no doubt there were "whispering tongues to poison truth;" and my father may have been embittered; but we are glad to remember that they met again in our home in Lasswade in the old kindly, joyous spirit.'<sup>16</sup> But there was no renewal of old intimacy.

In 1852 Findlay reported that he asked De Quincey 'if he ever visited his old friend Professor Wilson, who was at that time residing in bad health with his brother at Dalkeith. He said he had not. His reason for not going to see him was, he said, that he understood Wilson, from the nervous condition of mind into which he had fallen, did not care to see visitors; was not, indeed, able to receive them. "I have, however, intended for a considerable time to write to him. I have not

<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Bairdsmith to Japp, 17 February 1877. MS. in my possession. He was not a 'banker' as Japp asserts in Page, I, 332.

<sup>15</sup> Bl. MSS.; 6 May 1844.

<sup>16</sup> Findlay MSS.; 19 June 1885.

In conversation with Viscount Cranbrook at Bowness, on 15 September 1843, Wilson said, 'I was very intimate with him [De Quincey] and I believe I am now more intimate with him than any other person, and yet I hardly ever see him: I have not seen him above four times in six years (if I remember rightly), and yet his family asks tidings of him from me.' *National Review*, III (1884), 157-8. I can hardly credit the last clause, however. (I am grateful to Professor Alan Lang Strout for calling my attention to this item.)

yet accomplished my purpose, but I shall probably make it out to-morrow." ' ' <sup>17</sup> And again Findlay reported some talk about Wilson, about his pension and about his having to go to the Whigs for it. De Quincey spoke of its disproportionate amount; £300, one fourth of the whole sum annually allowed for literary distinction absorbed by Wilson. They spoke of Wilson's thin-skinnedness.<sup>18</sup> Thus to the last there appears in De Quincey's attitude a certain envy of Wilson, whose abilities he justly estimated lower than his own, continually successful in gaining positions and emoluments while he himself had been forced to struggle alone so desperately.<sup>19</sup>

## IV

LASSWADE was seven miles from Edinburgh and Blackwood's offices at 45 George Street; the mails were irregular and roundabout, and the cottage of Mavis Bush was small. As a result in March 1845, De Quincey was back again in Auld Reekie, living at Miss Carrick's, 71 Clerk Street.<sup>20</sup>

He was much better in general health; and we find him suddenly moving in society with a freedom which he had not known for many years. Promptly after his arrival he went to a party. On March 27 he wrote to Robert Blackwood, ' Could the learned have the slightest shade of suspicion that I was a trifle " cut " last night? ' It was certainly a rare occasion; for

<sup>17</sup> J. R. Findlay, *Personal Recollections of Thomas De Quincey* (Edinburgh, 1886), p. 18. These recollections are reprinted in Hogg, *Thomas De Quincey and his Friends*.

<sup>18</sup> Findlay, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson died on 2 April 1854. On September 19 Findlay in his *Recollections* (p. 47) reports the following conversation: — ' De Quincey remarked as a bad feature in Wilson's character his love to be surrounded by parasites — persons who were lower in position than himself, and who ministered to his vanity. He ridiculed the sickly, false sentiment of his works, and their evidently insincere and vulgar, over-wrought religionism. His works — his tales at least — were a jest among the Wordsworths. De Quincey spoke of Wilson as a lecturer. He had heard him once or twice. All dignity and impressiveness as a lecturer were destroyed by his drawing his forefinger down the side of his nose at the end of almost every paragraph. De Quincey's imitation of the action was very droll. He said that the hearer began to anticipate it whenever he saw Wilson coming to a pause, and the fulfilment of the expectation raised a sense of the ridiculous even in Wilson's grandest passages. His perverse emphasis — on " this," and " and," and " of," and other insignificant words — was also very distressing to a sensitive ear.' Even after Wilson's death, there is the same merciless intellectual analysis.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of 30 April 1845, in the possession of Miss Scott-Moncrieff.



De Quincey was, in an age of unlimited drinking, extraordinarily temperate in his use of alcohol. But his social activities were too much for him. Immediately afterwards he had a sharp attack of pleurisy; so that a fortnight later he could not yet stand upright. Still, to emphasize his new freedom, he had for several days been going to Leith where the sea had revived him. And he made a call of condolence upon the Blackwood ladies.<sup>21</sup> In other words, he had come through the opium war, he had re-established his physical condition, and he had overcome for the moment his fear of creditors. Incidentally, he was coaching his son Francis in Latin in preparation for an examination preliminary to his medical studies.<sup>22</sup>

But his creditors were not forgetful. On April 30 he was again in financial distress. It is told that in the evening he appeared late at the house of one of his friends. He came in with his usual suavity and readiness to converse. After a little delightful talk, however, the lady was warned by a glance from her brother that so late a visit must mean business and she withdrew. In the hall she found two men by the door waiting for Mr. De Quincey, a couple of bailiffs. Within the drawing-room De Quincey made one of his humorous explanations as to his situation and how it could be remedied. His friend settled the matter and released the prisoner; and later 'as the man of genius shuffled along the deserted pavement by his deliverer's side, he wound up the adventure by a characteristic vituperation. "Unideaed wretches!" he said . . . "I tried them on every subject under heaven, but they did not seem to have a thought in their minds unconnected with their base and brutal profession!"' <sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Bl. MSS.; 9 April 1845.

<sup>22</sup> Japp records that in October he went to Glasgow for a single night. (Page, I, 321.) He gives no evidence, but it is not improbable.

<sup>23</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, CXXII (1877), 729. It would seem to be the same incident of which De Quincey wrote in a letter to Syme Wilson: — 'On Saturday night I was arrested at the suit of two different creditors — Mr. Craig, a clothier, and Mr. Boyd (14 Royal Terrace) as successor to the rights of a Mr. Scott, deceased, for the arrears of two debts, six years old, on which I was really aware of no arrears.' Robert Blackwood, through his brother James, obtained a delay for him until Monday, and another until Thursday. The debts totalled 'nearly, if not quite, £60.' De Quincey hoped that by paying 25% down they would accept a bill for the remainder at one year without security. But if not, would Mr. Wilson act as security? Nothing but the extremity of the situation could have tempted him to ask such a

## V

IN the letter to Lushington quoted above, De Quincey had recovered the style of the early dreams, owing to the recurrent struggle against opium, or his victory over it. And now began the Indian summer of his genius, a return of his peculiar power. The result was the *Suspiria de Profundis: being a Sequel to the Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, which began an uncertain, fragmentary course in *Maga* in March 1845. De Quincey recognized his renewed power, and in elation wrote again to Lushington, the only friend at this time to whom he poured out his soul.

'I would not talk to any man of myself were the matter less interesting to my own feelings and those of my family, and would not that you might think it unfriendly if I claim your attention. Perhaps I told you, when you were last over at Lasswade, of the intention I had (and was then carrying into effect) to write another *Opium Confessionis*; or, if I did not tell you, it must have been only because I forbore to pester you too much with my plans — especially whilst unfinished, and liable to derangements more than once. Now, however, this particular plan, after occupying me for seven months of severe labour, is accomplished.' He had just received the proofs for the first part out of four, namely 'The Afflictions of Childhood.' Then he went on: — 'Whatever pleasure you may at any time have found in the original *Confessions*, to which, in part, I fancy myself indebted for the great kindness shown to me in Glasgow by yourself and Professor Nichol, will probably be trebled in this second series. One must not praise one's own writings positively, but comparatively one may. I, if at all I can pretend to judge in such a case, think them very greatly superior to the first. And three persons, who took the trouble to read this first part in MS., one of the three being Professor Wilson, have independently of each other communicated to me their sense of the superiority of these present *Confessions*, by language very much stronger than that which I have used. The four parts, when published in Blackwood through March, April, May, June and July, will be gathered into a volume without any delay, and introduced by a letter of some length to my three daughters.<sup>24</sup>

thing; for he remembered continually that he had received great service of this nature from Wilson, whilst he on his part had never had the opportunity of doing *him* any service of any kind or degree whatever. (Letter in the possession of Miss Scott-Moncrieff, 30 April 1845.)

<sup>24</sup> Possibly the draft of this preface is what Japp gives, I, 304 ff.

These final *Confessions* are the *ne plus ultra*, as regards the feeling and the power to express it, which I can ever hope to attain.' <sup>25</sup>

As a matter of fact, the *Suspiria* were never gathered into a volume; and the papers contributed to *Blackwood's* were not in all cases the *ne plus ultra* of his feeling and power; for in the collected works some of them were revised to their betterment. Nor were they at the time of the letter completed, as De Quincey implied.

## VI

THE *Suspiria* and *The English Mail Coach* which was to follow in 1847 were the consummation of his literature of dreams, his unique contribution, alas, too small, to prose poetry; of dreams, combining past facts and memories, swelling and magnifying themselves in infinite variety, until his sleeping life became a transcendent world of passion and terror. He was a born dreamer, as he tells us; but the influence of opium multiplied and enlarged his dreaming beyond that of any man who has brought back reports from the mysterious world of sleep. He above all men had the faculty of 'dreaming splendidly,' and he found this faculty a door to the infinite. 'The dreaming organ,' he wrote, 'in connection with the heart, the eye and the ear, compose the magnificent apparatus, which forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain, and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirrors of that mysterious *camera obscura*—the sleeping mind.'

In ordinary life, as in his work, De Quincey can hardly be described as strong in creative imagination. His reminiscences are based, naturally enough, on fact; his novels are singularly devoid of originality. His mind on the one side was essentially analytic and on the other associative. On the associative side, he could take an incident, such as that in *The English Mail Coach*, and weave it about with description, atmosphere, emotion, passion, all fused and sustained by magnificence of style. But of inventiveness, there is little. On the other hand, he had a memory of extraordinary power; not

merely able to recover the experiences of this world, but one able to seize and bring back with it the fleeting and terrific visions of his dream world. His dreams stamped themselves deeply upon his mind, many and crowding as they were, helped, no doubt, by the recognition unconsciously or intuitively, of the elements of which they were composed however much transformed. Add to these powers the mastery of a great and precise vocabulary and of large prose rhythms; and he possessed a combination of qualities unrivalled for recording the most elusive psychological experiences.

I know of no earlier dream literature which could even faintly have suggested to him either the form or substance of his dream pieces. He himself recognized their complete originality. As in the case of all greatly original works, one can find no analysis which really explains. The very anarchy of the brain in sleep makes the usual narrative of dreams unconvincing, largely because the narrators fail to make real the emotional concomitants. But it is in conveying the emotion, the tremendous intensity, that De Quincey is particularly strong; to such an extent, indeed, that one is convinced that the memories of his dreams must have literally forced themselves upon him in his waking consciousness. He was by nature introspective and he was largely solitary. In some of the dreams, he doubtless saw mysterious significance. Thus one can easily believe, as he tells us, that the memory of the dreams filled no negligible part of his waking hours in certain periods of his life, especially in his darker periods, with fears and agitations; and no less certainly was he harassed by painful anticipations of other dreams in his next period of sleep.

Yet while his dream world must more or less have constantly shadowed his waking life, there seem to have been only two or three periods when he was able or tempted to turn to his visions for literary themes. They were, I believe, periods which show attempts to reduce his slavery to opium; in the year or two after the great struggles of 1819 when he wrote the *Confessions* and again in 1844 and 1845, when he wrote his dream fugues. At such times the dreams either took on more definite outlines, or De Quincey, somewhat less

bound to his habit of opium eating, was in a position to take a more objective view of them.

But it is his style that raises his dream pieces to literature. The abundance of associative ideas which in his less restrained moments smothered his thought and facts is here controlled by art. His wealth of words and phrases of vague or broadly general suggestion; his virtuosity in the rhythms of prose; his command of connotation rather than of denotation — all were perfectly adapted to the rapidly moving scenes of the phantasmagoria. Even more marvellous are the architectonics of his pieces; the climax rising to dissolve in light or thunder, the terrible advance of menacing vastness or of oppressive crowds, the upward sweep of swelling music or whispering silences.

It is all magnificent, — and yet, in an age which tends to be critical of romantic exuberance, one is tempted to accept the lavishness of rhetoric with certain hesitations. Is it not, with all its splendour, somewhat overdone? Is there not in the coloratura passages a trace of too deliberate art and self-conscious effort? I fear that these hesitating questions are not without pertinence. And yet, how fine the pieces are! Unique! So that even if in these drab days one is slow to surrender completely to the purple passages, one must admit that they are grandly purple; that the attempts were worth making, and that no one else could have succeeded in the same gorgeous manner. The greater passages of the impassioned prose of De Quincey are triumphs — artistic triumphs: and if they are not to our complete liking, it is the thing that he was doing which we disapprove of, not his manner of doing it. At least, these pages of De Quincey are monuments to the possibilities of the English language superbly used.

But apart from the artistic success of these pieces, is the biographic implication. The fact that De Quincey dreamed those visions and lived with them for years, even though he could not at all times utter them in intelligible speech, must always be remembered while we read his other works, many of them pedestrian and dull. The little man, in his unworldly and suffering external life, through all his anxieties

over debts, poverty, domestic troubles, carried these experiences about with him. What wonder that he impressed the people whom he met as having a certain aura of strangeness, of justified strangeness? 'Eccovi, that child has been in hell,' was Carlyle's comment. Such constant inner experiences could not but have left discernible marks upon the outward man.

## VII

THE series in *Maga* gave trouble and brought about later in the year the break with the Blackwoods. On March 27 De Quincey was irritated that *Levana* and *Our Ladies of Sorrow* were not included in the first instalment even though they would have made the first part longer than the usual article, 'since there are many passages which will lose all, not only effect, but even *meaning*, if torn away from the context.' On April 22 there was some suggestion on the part of the editor of interrupting the series, and De Quincey protested. 'I feel that it will be a knock-down blow if they are interrupted. The disgust of readers from a balking, when expectation has at all been encouraged by the promises thrown out of coming effects or shocks is profound.' On May 19 a necessary note to the *Brocken* was misplaced. In short, there was unusual and, to him, unnecessary friction. And the serial did not continue regularly. March, April, June, July — then the papers stopped in the midst of part two.<sup>26</sup> The rest is silence. The letters to Blackwood also stopped, except for one short note of 10 November 1845: — 'Mr. De Quincey presents his compliments to Mr. Blackwood, and wishes to say — that, in the course of the present month, he will send the remainder of the *Suspiria* (now nearly finished) making in all from 72 to 83 pp. of the Magazine.' De Quincey himself seemed unable to keep the sequence going. That is the last mention of the *Suspiria*, and it is the last letter to the house of Blackwood. But not the last contribution to the Magazine; for in 1849 appeared *The English Mail Coach*, presumably the long paper 'nearly finished' in 1845.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Masson, *Works*, XIII, 391.

<sup>27</sup> The whole question of the writing and publication of the *Suspiria* and the intended plan is complicated. He had much difficulty in writing the

As to the break with *Blackwood's* we know nothing, except that there *was* a break. The last note with its formality and brevity shows that something had happened. But the correspondence reveals nothing more. De Quincey was at the time living in Edinburgh and constantly going to 45 George Street, so that the quarrel, if quarrel it was, never got upon paper at all. Mr. Robert Blackwood many years later in a letter to Mrs. Bairdsmith referred to De Quincey at the time when he began to collect his works, namely, about 1850, as 'estranged from my house.'<sup>28</sup> But the difference as far as personal relations went was finally made up or ignored in 1855. In an amusing letter of July 25, De Quincey wrote to his daughters that on a walk along the Queensferry Road he had met a party of gentlemen who challenged him as an acquaintance. He at last recognized one of them as Mr. John Blackwood; and he continued: — 'Some confused remembrance I had that we were or ought to be in a relation of hostility, though *why* I could ground upon none but fuscous and cloudy reasons. However, as it occurred to me that the belligerent party had never ceased to send me the monthly present of his magazine,

papers. On May 19 he wrote Blackwood, 'From 6 A.M. this day, I have done no one thing but correct. I have declined all going out for this purpose. But of all the tasks I ever had in my life, it is, from the aerial and shadowy nature of the composition, the most overwhelming.'

As for general plan, he staggered in fulfilling it. The papers as they appeared show no clearly discoverable arrangement. And when he spoke of publishing the *Suspiria* in book form he seems to have contemplated gathering together all his papers of dream phantasy, those written and those merely planned. In 1855 he wrote to his daughter Emily (May 7; BS. MSS. in a passage partly omitted by Japp, Page, II, 102): 'What am I staying here for? Chiefly and originally for the papers with which to finish the *Suspiria*. These at a cost of £8. 10s. I have through a process inexplicably long obtained from the Sheriff's office. But unfortunately one of the most important papers, viz. *The Daughter of Lebanon*, is not (as I thought it *had* been) in the last parcel. I am puzzled how to proceed.' In the General Preface to the *Selections Grave and Gay*, he writes, 'Of the *Suspiria* not more than perhaps one-third has yet been printed.' (*Works*, I, 14.) Had his intentions been carried out there would have been some 31 or 32 of the *Suspiria*. (MS. letter of Japp to Mr. H. S. Salt. See also *Posthumous Works*, I, Preface.) Evidently the task of gathering and ordering them proved too much for his strength or patience, so that finally he scattered such papers as he could lay his hands on through his works, adding some to the *Confessions*, grouping some with his *Autobiographic Sketches*, so that in the *Selections Grave and Gay* there were no *Suspiria* *quid* *Suspiria*. Only in the posthumous volume belatedly added to the Edinburgh edition of 1871 were the *Suspiria* printed as nearly as possible according to his probable original plan. It is all very confusing.

<sup>28</sup> Copy of letter of Mrs. Bairdsmith in my possession.

naturally the war could not have been conducted in a spirit of *acharnement*.' Then Mr. Blackwood greeted him with 'marked kindness,' and begged the privilege of driving his new wife to Lasswade that she might make the acquaintance of the Misses De Quincey.<sup>29</sup> And some weeks later in another casual encounter with Mr. John Blackwood, De Quincey was, as it were, actually captured by the enemy and taken *instantly* to drink tea with Mrs. Blackwood, who in turn, captivated the shy writer by her charm of manner and 'a most winning spirit of kindness.' So were the relations with John Blackwood reopened and continued. Yet even before the chance meeting with its pleasant consequences, the house of Blackwood had consented freely and generously to allow De Quincey to use unrestrictedly for his *Collected Works* all his material printed in their magazine.<sup>30</sup>

De Quincey contributed articles to *Tait's Magazine* for every number from September 1845 to September 1846, with the single exception of May. On 30 December 1845, Miss Helen Faucitt acted the *Antigone* of Sophocles in Edinburgh accompanied by the music of Mendelssohn; and De Quincey attended. By deliberate effort he arrived early in order to give the lie to his reputation of being always late, 'in respect to all coaches, steamboats, railroads, wedding parties, baptisms, and so forth;' he arrived six and a half minutes too soon! The music he decided was horribly bad; 'the overture slipped out at one ear as it entered the other.' But Miss Faucitt — 'O heavens! what a revelation of beauty! . . . Walking in brightness, the most faultless of Grecian marbles.' He was deeply moved; and he wrote a double article upon the *Antigone* for Tait as a result.

#### VIII

IN January 1846, his mother died, well on in the nineties, a valiant figure, if not always sympathetic. With her death De Quincey was brought nearer to his release from financial worries.<sup>31</sup> The actual increase to his income was not large;

<sup>29</sup> Page, II, 106; BS. MSS.

<sup>30</sup> John Blackwood to Mrs. Bairdsmith on 10 December 1877. (MS. copy by Mrs. Bairdsmith in my possession.)

<sup>31</sup> She died on 8 January 1846, at her house, Weston Lea, Bath (*Works*, IV,



the estate brought him £200 a year; but since she had long made him an allowance of £100, the net increase of his income was only £100. But the prudent management of his capable daughters and his own earnings made his life henceforth a comfortable one. With better health and freedom from worries, his old age was pleasantly free from the harrowing experiences which had bulked painfully large during the preceding thirty years.

4), in her ninety-third or ninety-fourth year. Her will, preserved in Somerset House, is dated 22 November 1838. She directed that she was to be buried in St. Michael's Church. She left all her personal property and the house of Weston Lea to her daughter Jane; and everything not conditioned by her husband's and her brother's wills. There was one exception, namely £100 to the widower of her daughter Mary, the Reverend Philip Searle. Jane and Mr. Searle were named as executors.

## CHAPTER XXI

### GLASGOW AGAIN

1846-1847

#### I

THE NEXT glimpse we get of De Quincey is in December 1846, in the recollections of Colin Rae Brown, dealing with the second Glasgow period. Brown wrote:

'At the close of 1846, the projectors of the *North British Daily Mail* offered me an engagement as business manager of the contemplated 'First Scottish Daily.' . . . The proprietors of the *Mail* had purchased the copyright of *Tait's Magazine*, and it was considered most advisable to secure the continued services of De Quincey as a leading contributor, and also to endeavour to get him to reside in Glasgow — for a time — so that he might be closely identified with the 'future' of the well-known Whig-Radical organ. I was accordingly instructed to arrange for a meeting with De Quincey in Edinburgh, and to offer him certain terms *re* contributions to *Tait*, and occasional special articles for the *Mail*. That meeting took place early in December 1846.' <sup>1</sup>

*Tait* first appeared in Glasgow in January 1847; and De Quincey went thither late in the preceding December. The *Mail* did not appear until April 14.

At that meeting with Brown, De Quincey 'at first hesitated a good deal, but in the end agreed to the terms proposed; while he stipulated, nevertheless, that his stay in Glasgow was not to exceed six months, and that apartments of a modest kind could [sic] be secured for him at the *highest altitude* possible in the northern part of the city. "I had some painful experiences," he went on to say, "of life in Glasgow several years ago, when I was victimised to within an inch of my life by the sulphuretted hydrogen — or some such noxious exhalation — which was then discharged into the atmosphere by the so-called 'Secret Works' at the 'Town-head.' But if I could get tidy apartments not very far from this objectionable manu-

<sup>1</sup> Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, pp. 111 ff.

factory, the great length of the chimney-stack would allow the wind to carry the pestilential smoke quite over and away from me."

Brown found a place for him answering to the specifications, in the 'Rottenrow,' a house, in 1881 called *Dean Place*, occupied by a widow of some sixty years who kept the house 'in a manner that might be termed scrupulously clean,' and who bore the name of Mrs. Tosh. 'The printing office and the Editorial chambers of the *Mail* and *Tait* were situated at a distance of about a mile from De Quincey's lodgings. . . He was in the habit of bringing copy down to town in detached portions, a practice which, joined to his somewhat irregular habits of rising, frequently kept half-set articles standing and printers idle.

'On one occasion — it was close on the 28th of the month, the date when the following month's magazine was supposed to be ready for the wholesale houses in London and Edinburgh — a most important article of De Quincey's had been partially set up, and our boy-messenger had twice returned from the "Rottenrow" with the same message from the landlady, "the old gentleman had no got oot o' his bedroom yet!" The editor was dreadfully put about. . . . I sent for a cab and drove up to the "Rottenrow" lodgings. As I had expected (having come to know about the "opium-eating"), I found on entering De Quincey's room, that he was either uncommonly sound asleep or in a state of stupor.<sup>2</sup> He lay stretched out on the hearthrug before the parlour fire-grate (his bedroom entering off that apartment), clad in an old dressing-gown, with no stockings on his feet, and merely a pair of thin, loose slippers over his toes. "I'm sure the puir body's deid!" the landlady exclaimed, as I bent down to ascertain whether he was really alive. . . . Looking about amongst his scattered books and papers on a small side table, I soon discovered the "tail of the copy" I was in search of, neatly tied up with red tape, and addressed to the "Editor of *Tait's Magazine*." Brown carried it off without waking the sleeper; and De Quincey never mentiond the 'copy' afterwards.

Of conversations with De Quincey, Brown jotted down memoranda. Of Burns, De Quincey said, 'Ah! the Ayreshire Colossus is still expanding outward and upward, in spite of

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hogg's account of finding De Quincey one morning in 'a state of stupor' after a slight accidental over-dose of opium. (Page, II, 28.)

all his detractors. If some of my Lake friends had had more critical insight, or more liberality, their immature deliverances on the achievements and future position of our Ayre-shire poet would have savoured more of the characteristics of genuine criticism and true prophecy.' He commented upon the 'burning malice and an intense dislike to Britain' which the Irish in America felt. 'It seems very much like that atrocious and viperous malignity imputed to the father of Hannibal against the Romans.' He corrected Brown's pronunciation of the proper name St. John; 'holding up his thin, pale right hand in deprecatory style, said, "Singen, my dear sir, Singen."' He argued for popular amusement halls, 'Winter Gardens, covered over with glass — such as Chaucer foreshadowed. . . . Both instruction and amusement — the latter consisting principally of music — might be combined in such institutions, and that at low — what is called popular — prices. . . . As it is, a poor, hard-worked artisan must either share a stuffy, ill-lighted and worse-ventilated apartment all the evening, along with his wife and children, or go — where? — to the nearest public-house. The whole system is rotten that does not provide something better for the spare hours of our toiling millions. . . .

'De Quincey was not destined to remain long under the watchful, motherly care of Mrs. Tosh. Her little grandson was suddenly struck down by scarlet fever, and we had to make immediate arrangements for transferring our valued contributor and his few belongings to another domicile. "Ah," he answered, putting his hand to his forehead, "that reminds me that I have been paying the rent of apartments in Renfield Street for a number of years. Many valuable books and papers are or should be there still."' Presumably he had been paying only a nominal sum for the storage of his books and papers; but he had been paying something ever since he left in 1843. So back to Renfield Street he went,<sup>8</sup> to his old quarters with the Youilles.

<sup>8</sup> On 15 January 1847 De Quincey was staying at the Royal Hotel, George Square, whence he came to take tea with Lushington; and where three days later Lushington again called to take him for a walk. On February 6 Lushington called upon him at 79 Renfield Street where he was installed. (Abstract of Lushington's diary in his own hand in my possession.)

Soon after he had arrived in Glasgow, he asked for a few pounds in advance of money due him at the end of the month. There were nearly £20 to his account; and Rae Brown assured him that he could have it all if he wished. Then Brown added, "But you told me on Saturday, when you drew £5, that you thought the money would be better to accumulate in our hands." He stared as I spoke, as if utterly bewildered, and at length broke out into a speech of pathetic appeal: "Well, well, what can I be thinking of? — You really must excuse me — but where can the money be?" So saying, he nervously thrust his right hand into his trousers' pocket and fished out a sadly crumpled envelope — the same into which I had placed five one-pound notes only a few days before. "I beg a thousand pardons. I believe I am becoming the most stupid of men." . . . As he left me, I saw him thrust the envelope and its contents well down into their former receptacle. It was wonderful at times to observe what he *did* bring forth from that seemingly capacious pocket — bits of red tape, two or three stumps of black-lead pencil, pieces of twine, etc.' <sup>4</sup>

Besides Lushington <sup>5</sup> and Nichol in Glasgow, he seems to have seen a good deal of George Troup, the editor of the *Mail* and of *Tait*. Troup's son, in his life of his father, speaks of an 'intimate friendship' between them. However that may be, De Quincey was a constant and much appreciated visitor at Troup's house. But that did not prevent Troup from having the editorial troubles which all had who dealt with De Quincey. 'It often happened . . . that the proof of one of the great man's articles requiring correction came into [Troup's] hands; but it was impossible to reach De Quincey, or get him roused up from the effects of his opium. On such occasions I have often heard my father say that the only successful method was to send a message that he was revising the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. a similar instance related by Hogg. (Page, II, 20.)

<sup>5</sup> The abstract of Lushington's diary gives exact information as to the frequency with which Lushington saw him. 'Jan. 15, De Q. came to tea from Royal Hotel, George Square. — 18. Called on De Q. at 79 Renfield St.; — 7. Walked with him; — 14. do.; — 19. called on —; — 21. do.; — 22. De Q. Came to dinner; March 8. De Q. and W. Thomson came to dinner; — 29. Called on De Q.; April 5. do.; — 18. Walked with —; Oct. 31. De Q. called; walked with him.'

proof and would *do his best with the Greek quotations*. This at once brought De Quincey to the office. The very idea of a wrong accent or a printer's mistake in his Greek was intolerable.' <sup>6</sup>

De Quincey remained in Glasgow until November 1847.<sup>7</sup> While he was there, the easier financial condition of the family made it possible for his daughters to travel to England to visit their relatives, the first time they had ever seen any of them. There are implications in the letters which De Quincey wrote to them in their absence that their Aunt Jane was helping them by a special gift. In any case, this was only the first of many other tours which they made during the years to come, to Bath, to Boston, and elsewhere; and for the first time they needed not to worry about their father. Certainly his letters to them from February to October reveal a genial gaiety which was entirely new. I shall quote a few passages to show his buoyant mood.

Thursday, June 10, 1847.

My dear M.,

I am rather disturbed that neither M. nor F. nor E. has found a moment for writing to me. . . . I have been suffering greatly myself for ten days, the cause being, in part, some outrageous heat that the fussy atmosphere put itself into about the beginning of this month — but what *for*, nobody can understand. Heat always untunes the harp of my nervous system; and, oh heavens! how electric it is! But, after all, what makes me so susceptible of such undulations in this capricious air, and compels me to sympathise with all the up-roads and *miffs*, towering passions or gloomy sulks, of the atmosphere, is the old eternal ground, viz., that I am famished. Oh, what ages it is since I dined! On what great day of jubilee is it that Fate hides, under the thickest of table-cloths, a dinner for *me*? Yet it is a certain, undeniable truth, which this personal famine has revealed to me, that most people on the terraqueous globe eat too much. Which it is, and nothing else, that makes them stupid, as also unphilosophic. To be a great philosopher, it is absolutely necessary to be famished. My intellect is far too electric in its speed, and its growth of flying armies of thoughts eternally new. I could spare enough to fit out a nation. This secret lies — not,

<sup>6</sup> G. E. Troup, in Japp, p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> Hogg, p. 121.

observe, in my hair; cutting off *that* does not harm: it lies in my want of dinner, as also of breakfast and supper. Being famished, I shall show this world of ours in the next five years something that it never saw before. But if I had a regular dinner, I should sink into the general stupidity of my beloved human brethren.<sup>a</sup> . . .

Wednesday, September 8, 1847.

My dear M.,

For a month I have been very ill, and am only just mending; viz., from a fever, not typhus, but perhaps as bad, caught I believe amongst a poor Irish family. They were one family amongst hundreds — lying out all the summer on the bridges over the Clyde, and on what is called '*the Green*,' a sort of smaller Hyde Park. I talked with many; indeed, walking there, how could I help it? They fastened on me, not I on them; and this family in particular, that I talked with most, being from Galway, bore that picturesque Spanish cast of countenance which Spanish settlers have felt in that country; though, I believe, it is now almost lost by diffusion. This Hispanico-Judaic appearance interested me; and I did not know until it was too late, that — though the parents were untouched — the children had a fever amongst them. I suppose it will be no pleasure to anybody that I should describe my intolerable sufferings for the last four weeks. So I delay the account for a century. Before this, however, I suffered so much from the summer heat, acting upon a system utterly famished of all nutriment (hares being of course gone, for they disappear a month earlier in *trebly* parsimonious Glasgow than in *doubly* parsimonious Edinburgh), that utter prostration seized me, and, which is far worse, utter nervousness; whence comes the reason that I have not written, or rather *sent* what I really did write, but left unfinished. Oh, the torments of endless famine! This inanition and prostration doubtless predisposed me to the contagion of fever, which indeed is sometimes *self-generated* by such a habit of body. Well, that job's jobbed. I mean, that explanation is made, which I should not have made except to make intelligible my silence. . . .

From Clifton, Mr. Grinfield [the Reverend Thomas G.] (who is, I think, rector or vicar or something of that place) wrote three months ago to renew our ancient intimacy, which was rather fallen into arrear, as you will think when I tell you that not one word have we exchanged — written word or

spoken — in this present nineteenth century. The last time I saw him — spoke to him — shook hands with him — was in the city of King Bladud, viz., Bath (Pump-room, to wit), in the year of Christ 1800, which year has been many times proved by most mathematical arguments to be the undoubted property, or great toe, of the eighteenth century, without the smallest relationship to any century that *you* are acquainted with. Consequently, there is a huge gap, as you perceive, in my Grinfield friendship. Yet, if you should meet him, since his letter (besides being complimentary) was really kind, say everything in apology that you know so well — Glasgow Green, Galway-Spanish Jews, fever (not typhus), no dinner since shaking hands with him in the eighteenth century, — in short, everything that ought to account satisfactorily for postponing an answer to his letter. But perhaps I shall postpone it no longer. So that he will say, in that case, and in case of your meeting him, 'O dear! your're quite misinformed; I've heard from him in the present century.' Bath being so near and he so much in company I believe, it is not unlikely that you may really meet. I will tell him, when I hear from you, at what date you will reach the city of the late King Bladud. Even Emily will hardly find out by subtraction when that King last saw company; it is a thing that requires algebra. He (not that royal blade, Bladud, but that reverend blade, Grinfield) would, I think, like to meet you; and *I* should like it. Not 'like to meet you,' I didn't mean *that* — *I have* met you at two or three parties — but like that you should meet him.

At the beginning of my fever I received a present which gave me real pleasure. It was from Walter Savage Landor: his last publication — a volume comprehending all his Latin poems that he wishes to own — and very prettily bound in odorous Russian leather. There is no author from whom I *could* have been more gratified by such a mark of attention.

Somewhere about the same time I received from an Edinburgh physician, Dr. Tait, who is the medical adviser of the Edinburgh police, a request that I would add a preface or a few notes to a work he is bringing out on opium-eating. He introduced himself through Dr. Handyside of the College, who in some letters he has written to me says that the work is highly thought of by the Edinburgh Medical body, to whom it was privately read in MS. I readily consented — the proof sheets have since been sent to me as they issued. And I, on my part, have nearly finished an Appendix of 35 or 40 pp., some parts of which will make you laugh. Dr. and Mrs. Tait



have since given me so pressing an invitation to visit them for as long as I choose, that I shall go, and should have gone before this. How is Florence? I heard with anxiety that she was rather what people call *delicate*. I hope by this time, through sea-air, &c., she has become *indelicate*.<sup>9</sup> . . .

Soon after his daughters' return, De Quincey left Glasgow for Lasswade where he lived for the next seven years.

<sup>9</sup> Page, I, 345 ff. This volume of Dr. Tait with the preface and notes by De Quincey was apparently never published. At least, I have been unable to find any trace of it.

## CHAPTER XXII

### LASSWADE ONCE MORE

1847-1854

#### I

FROM HIS return to Lasswade in 1847, the known facts in the life of De Quincey become fewer, and chronicle becomes often impossible. On the other hand, personal impressions and anecdotes grow in number — all more or less trustworthy. Friends, casual acquaintances, relatives become reminiscent of the now famous writer who was no longer the partially anonymous 'Opium Eater,' but at last discoverable in a definite *locus* and visitable in his own home. He was called upon by distinguished people, and by many less notable worshippers or lion-hunters; yet they often too obviously saw what they thought they ought to see rather than what they actually did see. Thus they tended to weave a kind of myth about their subject, instead of throwing light upon him. Their accounts are, however, largely confirmed by the few strictly objective memoirs, such as that of John Ritchie Findlay.

De Quincey was still in Glasgow on 31 October 1847; <sup>1</sup> his return to his family was early in November. At home were his three daughters, Margaret, Florence, and Emily; and Francis, the elder of his two living sons, who was completing his medical education at the University of Edinburgh, was also there now and then.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MS. excerpts from Lushington's diary in my possession. Japp says the return was late in October. (Page, I, 321.)

<sup>2</sup> The eldest daughter, Margaret, had been the head of the household ever since the mother died in 1837. She was not strong physically and was, during this period from 1847 on, threatened with consumption. But in 1853 she married Mr. Robert Craig, the son of a neighbour at Lasswade, and lived until 1871, leaving two children. She was an able domestic economist: she held the family together through trying years. She was 'the very best sister a family ever was blest with,' is Florence's comment. One gathers that she was practical; it was the younger sisters who made the music. With her husband, she went to Ireland to settle upon land in Tipperary, first at Pegsborough and later at Lisheen, where her sisters often stayed with her, and where De Quincey himself, in 1857, made a visit.

The second daughter, Florence, was in 1847 just twenty. She was obviously

On 10 January 1852 John Hill Burton walked with Findlay to Lasswade. Burton assured him that 'it was twenty chances to one' that they would not see De Quincey, for he was very

a brilliant and charming person. She was keenly alive to her father's genius; and it was she who in her later days was the defender of her father's reputation; eager and scrupulous in her co-operation with Dr. Japp in his biography of De Quincey. We owe much to her memories. Her personality must have been unusually attractive; it shines out of her letters; and the portrait by Richmond in the drawing-room of her daughters, shows her to have been a cultivated and even in her old age a singularly beautiful woman. In 1855 this second daughter went to India to marry Colonel Richard Bairdsmith to whom she had become engaged earlier and who had been born in Lasswade. In 1849 he had visited America and had become an intimate friend of Charles Eliot Norton; he was a gallant officer, and engineer; and made for himself a distinguished, nay, an heroic, reputation during the Indian Mutiny, at the siege of Delhi where he received serious wounds. Later he was in charge of the survey of the great famine of 1861. His wife returned to England in 1859 with two infant daughters, Florence Mae and Eleanor, just too late to see again her father before his death. Colonel Bairdsmith died on the voyage home to join his family in 1861. Mrs. Bairdsmith lived until 1904. Her younger daughter is still living; and she and two grand-daughters of Margaret Craig are the sole descendants of Thomas De Quincey in this year 1936.

De Quincey also found at home at Mavis Bush his youngest daughter, Emily; in 1847 sixteen years old. She was gay and full of fun, like Francis, and high spirited. She was musical and fond of books. She never married. After Margaret married and left for Ireland in 1853, and after Florence left for India in 1855, she remained for her father to turn to in time of need. When De Quincey wished to return to Lasswade, she was summoned back from Ireland or England; if he was ill, she was ready to nurse him. It was she who watched over his bed at the end. She was a devoted daughter; but she had a keen sense of humour and was outspoken. Some of her letters in later years about her father and her family are delightful reading. She wrote, and apparently spoke, with expressiveness and verve. She was, as her nieces have told me, 'somewhat of a character' in her old age. She was passionately devoted to animals, and a vegetarian. She died in 1917.

The three girls during the Lasswade period were a handsome and charming trio. Tradition is borne out by the chalk drawing by Archer of De Quincey surrounded by his daughters and his grand-daughter, Eva.

In a letter by Florence De Quincey to Miss Quincy of Boston dated 21 May 1853, we get the following: — 'Francis the eldest is like a May morning, he is of such a bright nature. He seems sometimes beset by a demon of fun that sweeps him along he doesn't know where, and the consequence is that tho. possessing as much strength of affection as Fred he is not such a general favourite, but those who do love him love him fervently. He, too, has we think, considerable talent, tho. some of us once feared that it might be of a rather unsteady order. We have no fears now, however, as he has gone through the dry hard studies necessary for his profession [of medicine] with great credit, and under very disadvantageous circumstances, and now he has been gone from home for nearly three years to pursue his profession in a place [namely, Brazil] where the people seem so childish that tho. he finds them good natured, and can extract the most exquisite amusement from them, in all other respects it is extremely distasteful.' (MS. formerly in the possession of the late J. P. Quincy, Esq.)

Mrs. Bairdsmith adds a supplementary comment in a letter to J. R. Findlay (15 January 1877: Findlay MSS.): 'The flower of the flock . . . was my dear brother Francis. . . He was bidding fair to be that wonderful phenomenon

shy of strangers or visitors of any sort. But they did see him — 'a man, once seen, never to be forgotten.' Findlay wrote: 'He was a very little man (about 5 feet 3 or 4 inches); his countenance the most remarkable for its intellectual attractiveness that I have ever seen. His features, though not regular, were aristocratically fine, and an air of delicate breeding pervaded the face. His forehead was unusually high, square and compact. At first sight his face appeared boyish, fresh and smooth, with a sort of hectic glow upon it that contrasted remarkably with the evident appearances of age in the grizzled hair and dim looking eyes. The flush of bloom on the cheeks was, I have no doubt, an effect of his constant use of opium; and the apparent smoothness of his face disappeared upon examination. The best description of his peculiar appearance in this respect is one given by Sir Walter Scott in reference to General Platoff, whom Scott met at Paris, and from whom, he tells us, he took his portrait of Mr. Touchwood in *St. Ronan's Well*. "His face, which at a distance of a yard or two seemed hale and smooth, appeared, when closely examined, to be seamed with a million of wrinkles crossing each other in every direction possible, but as fine as if drawn by the point of a very fine needle." Mr. De Quincey's eyes were dark in colour, the iris large, but with a strange flatness and dimness of aspect, which, however, did not indicate any deficiency of sight. So far as I ever observed

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a rich De Quincey, and entirely by his hard work. He had been out there [in Brazil] ten years and was proposing coming home to the great joy of us all, when one lovely summer morning, we woke up to hear that the most terrible blow of our lives had fallen upon us. The dear brother the pride of our lives was dead. He had got yellow fever and before we could hear that he was ill he was laid in his grave.' [In 1861.]

The fifth living child, although not at Lasswade, was Paul Frederick, born in the autumn of 1826, embarked for India with the 70th regiment in time to be present at the battle of Sobraon in 1846, the closing conflict of the first Sikh War 'for which he has a medal and very soon after got his lieutenancy.' I am again quoting the letter of Florence, of 1853. 'Since when his promotion has been exceedingly slow. He is Interpreter to his regiment, and is qualified to hold certain staff appointments which by a recent change has [sic] been thrown open to Queen's officers in India. I am afraid, however, his interest is not sufficient to procure him one.' Fred was 'a creature with as we thought something more than ordinary abilities, but of this I am free to confess we may be partial judges; but there can be no doubt that he was full of womanly tenderness of nature, and a quiet, lovable fun that made him liked by every one.' In 1857 he left the army, returned for a short time to England, and settled finally in New Zealand where he was living in 1889.

he saw distant objects tolerably well, and almost to the very end of his life he could read the smallest print without spectacles. I remember on one occasion he talked about George Gilfillan's pen-and-ink portrait of himself, in which the Reverend George spoke disparagingly of his eyes, declaring that De Quincey never looked people straight in the face. He resented keenly the imputation that he had anything approaching to a squint, still more keenly, in his own humorous style, the insinuation, which he declared George intended, that he had also a "moral squint." He had certainly neither the one nor the other; he looked quite straightforward at one; but it was often difficult to catch his eyes from the hazy expression diffused over them. They had the dreamy look often observable in students or in short-sighted people.<sup>3</sup>

'No one who ever met De Quincey could fail to be struck, after even the briefest intercourse, with the extreme sweetness and courtesy of his manners. He had the air of old-fashioned good manners of the highest kind; natural and studied politeness, free from the slightest ostentation or parade; a delicacy, gentleness, and elegance of demeanour that at once conciliated and charmed. As Mr. Burton was well acquainted with the family, and had much to say to the young ladies, De Quincey and I were left for the most part to carry on a sort of side conversation between ourselves, a position which I found at first sufficiently embarrassing. Here I was, a novice, set face to face with one of the greatest masters of conversation — of a special kind of it at least — of his day, with the talk drifting about to all sorts of subjects, for none seemed to come amiss to him. In any attempt to transcribe, or rather describe, his conversation, the chief difficulty would be to fix — perhaps to account for — a certain evanescent charm which everyone felt, but which can be only remembered, not transmitted. It was in fact an exquisite and transient emanation from the intellectual and moral nature of the man, enhanced

<sup>3</sup> Gilfillan, *Gallery of Literary Portraits* (1845), says: — 'His eyes, they sparkle not, they shine not, they are lustreless: can that be a squint which glances over from them towards you? No. It is only a slight habit one of them has of occasionally looking in a different direction from the other; there is nothing else particular about them; there is not even the glare which lights up sometimes dull eyes into eloquence.'

in its effect by the rare beauty of his language, and the perfectly elegant construction of every phrase and sentence that he uttered. The comparison which the American poet and critic and diplomatist, Mr. James Russell Lowell, makes of good style to good breeding is admirably applicable alike to De Quincey's literary style and to his personal manner. Lowell speaks of "that exquisite something called style, which, like the grace of perfect breeding, everywhere persuasive and nowhere emphatic, makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness." He did not quite, as Burton told me he would do, talk magazine articles, but the literary habit was notable, though not in the least obtrusive, in all his talk. One effect of this was somewhat trying to an inexperienced listener, for when in the flow of his conversation he came to the close of one of his beautifully rounded and balanced paragraphs, he would pause in order to allow you to have your say, with the result sometimes of rather taking one aback, especially as the subject of conversation often seemed to have been brought, by his conduct of it, to its complete and legitimate conclusion. The listener was apt to feel that he had perorated rather than paused. In his mode of conversing, as in everything else, his courtesy of manner was observable. He never monopolised talk, allowed everyone to have a fair chance, and listened with respectful patience to the most commonplace remarks from any one present. The fact that any one was, for the time, a member of the company in which he also happened to be, evidently in his eyes entitled the speaker to all consideration and respect. But he had a just horror of bores, and carefully avoided them. We talked among many other things, about Macaulay, and about his prodigious power and love of talk. De Quincey remarked that such passion for speaking was usually the sign of a weak and shallow mind, but that Macaulay was a remarkable exception to this rule — that he was the only man of real power and substantial acquirements of whom he had ever heard, who was possessed by "an actual incontinence of talk." Even Coleridge, regarded as the greatest talker of the day, would not always talk, whilst Macaulay seemed ready to pour forth

a flood of disquisition and information at any given time. With Coleridge there was always one difficulty, and sometimes two. It was sometimes a great difficulty to get him to begin to talk; it was always so to get him to stop.

'On our leaving, Mr. De Quincey accompanied us to the door, and whilst he was standing in the little garden plot in the front of the house I observed that his feet had been thrust stockingless into an old pair of slippers. And here he was, a man of sixty-three years of age [error for sixty-seven], and apparently of extreme feebleness, thus standing bare-headed in the raw air of a January afternoon. We remarked that he would catch cold, and were hurrying away, but he begged us not to be the least uneasy on his account, for he never did take cold; it was one of the many advantages of opium that it preserved him against all such trivial accidents. His dress, to an allusion to which I have thus been drawn incidentally, was at all times peculiar. His clothes had generally a look of extreme age, and also of having been made for a person somewhat larger than himself. I believe the real cause of this was that he had got much thinner in those later years; whilst he wore, and did wear, I suppose till the end of his life, the clothes that had been made for him years before. I have sometimes seen appearances about him of a shirt and shirt-collar, but usually there were no indications of these articles of dress. When I came to visit him in his lodgings, I saw him in all stages of costume; sometimes he would come in to me from his bedroom to his parlour, as on this occasion, with shoes, but no stockings, and sometimes with stockings, but no shoes. When in bed, where I also saw him from time to time, he wore a large jacket — not exactly an under-jacket, but a jacket made in the form of a coat, of white flannel; something like a cricketer's coat in fact. In the street his appearance was equally singular. He walked with considerable rapidity (he said walking was the only athletic exercise in which he had ever excelled) and with an odd one-sided, and yet straightforward, motion, moving his legs only, and neither his arms, head, nor any other part of his body — like Wordsworth's cloud —

“Moving altogether, if he moved at all.”

His hat which had the antediluvian aspect characteristic of the rest of his clothes, was generally stuck on the back of his head, and no one who ever met that antiquated figure, with that strangely dreamy and intellectual face, working its way rapidly, and with an oddly deferential air, through any of the streets of Edinburgh — a sight certainly by no means common, for he was very seldom to be seen in town — could ever forget it.' <sup>4</sup>

All the evidence coincides as to his clothes, his manners and his conversation. Miss Mitford's friends sent her a report 'of an appearance so neglected that he looks like an old beggar, of manners so perfect that they would do honour to a prince, and of conversation unapproached for brilliancy.' And James T. Fields declared that 'if good manners had never been invented before, De Quincey would have invented them.' But as to his clothes, his daughter wrote later, 'they were not always old, nor too large as a result of shrunken age; on the contrary, he somehow always managed to get new clothes too large in spite of the best efforts of his children, and to wear them as if they were old.' <sup>5</sup>

She elsewhere wrote that at home he was too busy with his ideas and work to think of clothes. 'It might be that a thought occurred to him in the midst of his irregular processes of dressing or undressing (I should say some thought generally did strike him at that time), and he would stop with his coat just taken off or not put on, without stockings at all, or with one off and one on, and becoming lost in what grew out of this thought, he would work for hours, hardly ever noticing the coffee which was his chief support at such times.' If visitors appeared, rather than keep them waiting, he 'would appear at once . . . while he put on the other stocking, or whatever might be wanting, or which was just as likely, in the wrong place.' <sup>6</sup>

With his courtesy of manner, accorded his remarkable voice. 'It was extraordinary; it came from dreamland; but it was the most musical and impressive of voices.' So

<sup>4</sup> Findlay, pp. 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Bairdsmith to Professor Masson, March 1886; MS. copy in my possession.

<sup>6</sup> Page, I, 361.



speaks R. P. Gillies. 'Silvery' is an adjective constantly used of it.<sup>7</sup>

He was deliberate and elaborate in all his movements, as well as in speech. Thomas Hood, speaking of De Quincey in the early twenties of the century, recalled him thus: — 'He looks, thinks, writes, talks and walks, eats and drinks and no doubt sleeps philosophically, i.e. deliberately. There is nothing abrupt about his motions; he goes and comes calmly and quietly; like the phantom in *Hamlet*, he is here — he is there — he is gone! So it is with his discourse. He speaks slowly, clearly, and with very marked emphasis; the tide of talk flows like Denham's river, "strong without rage, without o'erflowing, full."'<sup>8</sup>

Mr. James T. Fields, in 1852, adds further confirmation. 'Style with him had an absolute value of itself, and was in itself an exquisite art. . . . As we walked along together his manner was at times singularly nervous and startling. Not infrequently he spoke like a man who had seen ghosts, and there was a kind of solemn awe and wonder in his tone. Much of the time he walked bareheaded, as if his brain were hot and restless. When he mentioned the Supreme Name in conversation it was always with that august reverence which is born of faith and unceasing worship. On our way to the ruins of Roslin Chapel he discoursed of absorbing themes that went unwritten with him to the grave. Grandeur views of immortality I have never heard from mortal lips. And could he have been induced to put on paper what he was in the habit of speaking on the sublimest subjects, no addition ever made to merely human literature could possibly be of more value to our race.'<sup>9</sup> The impressionable Fields was deeply moved.

## II

DE QUINCEY was a conservative in religion as in politics, clinging with affection and conviction to the established church. He was as a child brought up in the evangelized tenets of the late eighteenth century and was at home sur-

<sup>7</sup> One witness in regard to his very last years speaks of his voice as sinking to a monotonous level.

<sup>8</sup> Hogg, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Japp, p. 423.

rounded by what he later came to feel to be a stuffy atmosphere; and if he finally drew away from that particular brand of the established religion to a position not defined, he always remained faithful to the church itself. After his childhood, even although in his early years divine service offered opportunities for the meditation and the waking dreams so dear to him, he seems never to have been a regular attendant. In all the records, of which we have a good many for certain stretches of his career, there is almost no reference to church-going; and during long periods, he can never have attended at all. Whatever might be his beliefs and his love of Christianity as a faith and as an institution, public worship played no considerable part in his life.

Yet he was always profoundly interested in Christianity and in its past; and among his papers are a number upon church history and Christian problems; the papers upon the Essenes, for example, upon Judas Iscariot, upon Christianity as an Organ of Political Movement, upon Miracles. But above all he was a constant champion of the Christian cause and beliefs, especially as against the ancient pagan. Again and again, he pointed out with passionate loyalty to the 'true faith' the lack of idealism in the religions of Greece and Rome; the lack of anything approaching religion in the Christian sense among the ancients, with its conception of deity as the embodiment of love, with its relationship of Father and Child as between God and man, with the ideas of a satisfying immortality and altruistic ethics. So convinced was he of the lack of divine essence in all other religions whatsoever, that his judgments upon the benighted Greeks and Romans were violently prejudiced and can hardly stand in the light of later knowledge and wider sympathy. In the same way, individuals who attacked Christian dogmas or denied the validity of the revelation of Christianity, or who, even with no necessary intent to destroy Christianity, were sceptical on philosophic grounds, were to him anathema. Thus it was that Kant seemed to him a dangerous and disruptive force. Thus it was that Kant's philosophy which he had approached with such enthusiasm in his Oxford days, soon came to be hateful; so that for years he could not con-

template it disinterestedly. Thus it was, also, in part that he was repelled by Goethe. Yet in justice, it must be added that he was not ordinarily bigoted. He could speak with calmness of Newman and with praise of one of his books in 1845 when Newman had been newly confirmed in the Catholic Church. But he would not call those who denied the divinity of Christ Christians; and he could not even believe that any true philosophy was possible which was not founded upon Christianity — a sweeping statement casting out of court, *a priori*, Plato and all the philosophies of the pagan world. But to protestant sects, so long as they held to the essential dogmas, he had no hostility; and he believed firmly in the right of every individual to his own faith.

Temperamentally, one might suppose that De Quincey would have been a mystic. His passion for music and his complete surrender to musical experience point in that direction. His devotion to Wordsworth's poetry, which included Wordsworth's worship of nature, also points thither. De Quincey is often at his grandest when he is filled with awe by the vastness of the night and the infinities of the universe; astronomy had a strong appeal for him. Like Wordsworth, De Quincey had in his earlier years certain 'spots of time' — sudden visions or waking dreams, such as he recorded in the presence of his dead sister, and on the occasion of his visiting for the first time the Whispering Gallery at St. Paul's. Like Wordsworth's these experiences became less frequent and then entirely ceased; but never did they have such an effect upon him as they had upon Wordsworth. He cannot, I think, be called in any full sense a mystic. His mind for the most part mastered his emotions, whatever may have been the depths of his religious feelings.

In a man so sensitive and reticent, his public confessions were not likely to reveal the intimacies of his spiritual world. Crying as he so often did from the very depths of despair, he seems never to have sought help in cries to God. The ordinary religious vocabulary was not his, perhaps because of the reaction against his early religious training. Such religion as he reveals appears rather in his deep intellectual concern for the divineness and sublimity of the Christian dogma, in

his wonder at the mystery of the universe, in his love for children and unfortunates, and in his normal gentleness and consideration for others.

## III

WITH Coleridge and Macaulay, De Quincey was generally considered one of the greatest 'talkers' of his time, although, neither Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, nor Southey, — men whose word we should like to have had <sup>10</sup> — has left any recorded appreciation of De Quincey's conversation. That De Quincey valued conversation for its own sake, however, as an art, we have his own admirable essay to prove; and that he deliberately cultivated it is equally certain. By indirection, his criticisms of Coleridge's talk assert his own consciousness of superiority, especially in his avoidance of the monologue. Unlike Coleridge, he was a good listener. In this fact appeared his innate courtesy. 'He was always for giving way; scrupulously on the watch for any, the slightest, token of interruption, objection, comment, assent, question, or answer, nothing could exceed his tone of unaffected deference with which he gave heed as well as ear to whatever his companion might have to say.' <sup>11</sup> And in the right moods, De Quincey found joy in conversation.

When he was at ease and talking freely, he was, as one must gather from his reminiscences, given to the utmost freedom of opinion, careless as to the possibility of his remarks being quoted or misquoted. Especially was this true in his comments upon people whom he had known. His merciless candour now and then caused trouble. 'My father was a terribly unguarded man in conversation,' wrote Miss Emily De Quincey. 'Sitting chatting over a tea-table in his own home it never struck him that there were itching ears ready to scatter broadcast some rather slighting remark of a well known person which was perfectly true often, a perfectly innocent and just remark, but which was sure to cause anger if

<sup>10</sup> Crabb Robinson, in 1814, was unimpressed. 'He was certainly cold and dry' is his comment, 'and wanted all power of conversation.' De Quincey was doubtless not at his best at the moment; but Robinson always found him unsympathetic and is persistently depreciatory. *Blake, Coleridge, etc.*, ed. E. J. Morley, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Jacox, in *Page*, I, 380.

repeated, and we found it had been carried to the person with lively additions.' <sup>12</sup> She was referring to Miss Martineau who repeated at Ambleside comments upon Wordsworth, later printed.

Such candour must have added, especially when uttered in his deliberate and gentle way, spice to talk, giving pleasure which comes from gossip, but raised above gossip by deliberate judgment and knowledge. Gentle as he was in manner and sensitive to the courtesies of life, he would not willingly offend; yet on intellectual planes, honest and analytic, he thought aloud, as all great conversationalists must.

He never tolerated any *double entendre* or *risqué* story. Miss Emily again bears witness. 'I remember well his drinking in company with some young officers, one was his future son-in-law [Colonel Bairdsmith], but there was a hoary old sinner of the old school who thought that a few doubtful stories when the ladies retired would be "grateful and refreshing" like somebody's cocoa. "I was struck by the dead silence," my father said, "and flatness that his nasty stories produced. I don't think there was a smile." . . . He used often to read aloud to us in an evening and, though some of the things were of the old style when foul talk is mistaken for wit, he would pull up. "That will not suit the case of young ladies." Neither he nor any of his old gentlemen friends ever indulged in doubtful stories, though some of them were very lively, I should say almost noisy, and I am sure they just talked before us as they talked with one another, and very amusing it was.' <sup>13</sup>

De Quincey was, however, not always in the right mood for conversation. Sometimes his health was bad, and he could not bring himself to talk. Woodhouse recorded, we may remember, more than one occasion in 1821 when he sat silent. Now and then he was actually irritable. His daughter Margaret wrote to Miss Quincy of Boston in 1852 of a visit to De Quincey of a Mr. Waterson, Miss Quincy's brother-in-law. Margaret was out at the time; but her sisters told her that her father was ill, and that his illness took 'the *very, very* rare

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Mr. H. S. Salt, 24 July 1907; Salt MSS.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Mr. H. S. Salt, July 1908; Salt MSS.

form of making him appear a very testy and discontented man.' <sup>14</sup> It was, however, torpor rather than testiness which in those days marked his 'off' periods. As always, he did his best work at night, consuming much tea and coffee the while. He went to bed in the early hours and woke late. Because of his continued use of opium, he was often torpid during the early day. Jacox wrote of him in 1852, that for some time on each morning while Jacox was a guest at Mavis Bush, De Quincey appeared 'grievously depressed and prostrate.' <sup>15</sup>

The willingness to talk came most often to him in small groups or when he was alone with friend or visitor. 'It was when alone with him that I learned to know him,' Francis Jacox says. 'In fact, had I seen him at this period of life [1852] only in company, I should not have seen him at all.' <sup>16</sup> De Quincey was at his best talking on a tramp in the open air, when the torpor which often possessed him indoors was driven out by exercise, as when he had opened up to Fields; or in the late evening after dinner, stimulated by his own conversation, when he would go on endlessly. Indeed, in his latter years his landlady's sister, Miss Stark, used to call for him when he was out for the evening, 'lest he should forget to come home at the hour fixed as he was apt to get liveliest in the early hours, and to begin then to feel at home with his friends.' And Mr. Findlay wrote, 'The first difficulty was to get him to visit you, the second to reconcile him to leaving.' <sup>17</sup>

There were houses where he liked to dine. Among them was that of Mrs. Crowe with whom he was on unusual terms of intimacy, to the extent of calling her by her first name, Catherine. It was at her house that he first met Professor Nichol; there also he met Dr. Samuel Brown, the chemist; and again, he there met Emerson upon his visit to Edinburgh in 1848. Emerson records the meeting: — 'At Edinburgh, dined at Mrs. Crowe's with De Quincey, David Scott and Dr. Brown. De Quincey is a small old man of seventy years,' —

<sup>14</sup> Letter of 21 September 1852, formerly in the possession of the late Mr. Josiah P. Quincy.

<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Findlay who saw him often, reports that only on one day, namely, 10 November 1853, 'of the many times I saw De Quincey at all hours and under all circumstances . . . did he not shine.' (Findlay, p. 22.)

<sup>16</sup> Page, I, 387.

<sup>17</sup> Findlay, p. 29n.

actually sixty-three at the time — 'with a very handsome face — a face marked by great refinement, — a very gentle old man, speaking with the utmost deliberation and softness, and so refined in speech and manners as to make indifferent his extremely plain and poor dress. For the old man, summoned by message on Saturday by Mrs. Crowe to this dinner, had walked on this rainy, muddy Sunday ten miles from his house at Lasswade and was not yet dry, and though Mrs. Crowe's hospitality is comprehensive and minute, yet she had no pantaloons in her house. He was so simply dressed that ten miles could not spoil him. It seemed, too, that he had lately *walked home*, at night, in the rain, from one of Mrs. Crowe's dinners. "But why did you not ride?" said Mrs. C.: "you were in time for the coach." Because he could not find money to ride; he had met two street girls; one of these took his eight shillings out of his waistcoat pocket, and the other his umbrella. He told this sad story with the utmost simplicity, as if he had been a child of seven, instead of seventy.' <sup>18</sup>

De Quincey's elaborate and literary style of talk became so much a part of him, that in daily life his sentences and vocabulary, like his clothes, were occasionally too large. We can recall the admonition to Baldwin's typesetter in regard to punctuation which he reported to Dorothy Wordsworth in 1809, namely, that the man acted from a 'non-perception of

<sup>18</sup> Emerson found De Quincey interesting or amusing; but he was not enthusiastic. He went to Lasswade to dine at Mavis Bush, accompanied by Mrs. Crowe and Dr. Brown, on February 19. Mrs. Crowe carried De Quincey back with them to attend Emerson's lecture; and De Quincey almost disgraced his hostess in the hall by falling asleep, lulled by the 'American nasal sing-song of [Emerson's] speech.' (Japp, p. 310.)

Evidently Mrs. Crowe and Dr. Brown looked upon De Quincey as a lively subject for talk, for Emerson in his *Journals* (VII, pp. 388; 397-8) records some anecdotes which bear marks of being the somewhat careless product of a sprightly conversation; and which are obviously to be taken *cum grano salis*. For example: — 'Dr. Brown and Mrs. Crowe told me in detail the story of [De Quincey's] rescue from the hands of this Mrs. Mac Bold who was his evil genius, and had exercised a reign of terror over him for years — a very powerful and artful, large-limbed, red-haired beldame, from whom flight to Glasgow and concealment there was the only help, whilst his friends, with Wilson, contrived the extrication of his valuable papers and literary manuscripts from her custody. The woman followed him to Glasgow,' etc., etc. This Mrs. MacBold would seem to be either Mrs. McIndoe or Miss Miller — perhaps both; for I know of no Mrs. MacBold. The story as it stands does not accord accurately with the facts which we have seen. I think that it need not be taken too seriously. Emerson was merely being entertained.

the possibility of logical equilibration of sentences,' an admonition which, De Quincey added, 'I believe he took for an imprecation.' In later years, we hear of the maid-servant who left the family on the grounds that she was 'feared o' Mr. De Quincey, he used such awfu'-like language;' and of another humble person who declared, 'Ah, Mr. De Quincey, you are a great man, a very great man; *no* body can understand you.'<sup>19</sup> Even his business notes, as we have more than once seen, were expressed in balanced and intricate phrases which often resulted in mere wordiness.<sup>20</sup>

Another characteristic of his talk, often ignored by his admirers in their reports — those who were looking for the visionary and the sublime — was his constantly recurring humour, cropping out often to disconcert the worshippers in the midst of serious themes, or expressing itself in grotesque and extravagant ways. He rarely laughed at all; but not the less did he enjoy his own sallies and he was capable of smiling at himself; he could often see the humour of his own helplessness and practical futility.

Mr. Findlay tells one anecdote of how De Quincey had walked in from Lasswade to dinner with Mr. Ritchie, Findlay's uncle. De Quincey had been taken to a room to wash, in which was the then unusual equipment of running water. Findlay turned on the water and left the room for a moment to fetch a towel. De Quincey stood the while 'in an attitude of paralysed perplexity, a little way off from the nearly brimful basin. His alarm was lest the basin should overflow and deluge the room,' and he be unable to turn the taps. 'He

<sup>19</sup> Page, I, 376.

<sup>20</sup> 'His language naturally and unavoidably shaped itself into such stately phrases; if any auditor were tempted to smile at their occasionally somewhat inappropriate pomp and elegance he would have readily joined in the laugh — though, indeed, he rarely laughed at all — and would have amplified the illustrations and heightened the humour of the occasion.' (Findlay, p. 38n.)

'We had a new little house-maid who evidently agreed with Lord Brougham. My father, painfully alive to impressing upon anyone the differences of rank made a rather too elaborate apology for "taking the liberty of asking her to do such menial work as bringing up coal." She glaired at him but did what she was asked. When asked by the lady who recommended her how she liked her new place, "Oh, I like the young leddies gye weal, but Mr. De Quincey is an awfu' like men for cursing and swearing when I bring the coals," &c. Poor man, he never said a harsh word to a servant maid or to a child. A pert young man could call forth his wrath.' (Emily De Quincey to Lawrence Clay, Esq., 29 Jan. 1904.)



justified his fears by calling attention to the rapid inflow of water, and made the most amusing comparisons of himself to the hero of the German story *Undine*, overwhelmed by waters which he had conjured up but could not control.' <sup>21</sup> Helpless, he smiled at his own helplessness; but not always.

Occasionally his guilelessness left him without humour. One day De Quincey went to dine with a gentleman in Edinburgh and was induced to spend the night. His bedroom had been recently occupied by a delicate brother of his host who had left behind a few medicine bottles nearly empty, but all neatly arranged on the wash-stand. Emily De Quincey is telling the story. 'My father, left alone, began to examine them. . . . Surely, he thought to himself, it would be hard if one of these mixtures did not suit him. Surely no one would grudge him the heel-taps of a lot of old medicine bottles. Having read and marked the labels, he forthwith proceeded to inwardly digest the contents of the bottles. Soon, however, his conscience began to prick him. Had he not taken a great liberty? Perhaps his host wished to try their effect upon himself, or his wife did. Perhaps they were to be kept as a tender reminiscence of the absent brother. The next morning he descended to the breakfast-table, and with grave propriety made his apologies to his host for having abused his hospitality.' The apologies were received to the little man's astonishment with a burst of laughter, checked by fears of ill consequence. But De Quincey assured him that something — though the something could not be discovered — had been decidedly beneficial.<sup>22</sup>

Naturally, it was when he was in good form that he had most often what Hogg calls clumsily 'a recurring vein of exquisite jocularly.' 'I could generally foretell,' Hogg writes, 'when he was about to indulge in this pastime. He would give himself a sharp pinch in the arm, as if he were an organist pulling out some stop. Things political in the newspaper, absurd police cases, whimsical wills, and such like material, he would take up and polish off in a bantering fashion.' Thus Kant's garters were a delight to him. Kant was afraid of any-

<sup>21</sup> Findlay, p. 37n.

<sup>22</sup> Page, II, 302. Reminiscence of Miss Emily De Quincey.

thing which might interfere with his circulation, and devised a kind of box-windlass at the waist, like an angler's reel with a spring, to keep his stockings in place. 'Behold Kant then expounding his philosophy to a select circle of his disciples,' working the windlass as he talked; 'paying out the cable' or 'hauling in the slack!' And, as Hogg reports, De Quincey recurred to the theme again and again to his own renewed and intense amusement.<sup>23</sup> 'Both Lamb and myself,' De Quincey writes, 'had a furious love for nonsense — head-long nonsense. Excepting Professor Wilson, I have known nobody who had the same passion to the same extent.'

## IV

HE was at home at Lasswade with his three daughters and two servants. His study was on the ground floor of the little cottage to the right of the entrance, into which few visitors penetrated and in which he was allowed to pile up his books and papers as he liked. 'He lamented the smallness of his "den" overcrowded with books and papers. In this room he left himself space only to slide along to his table through piles of volumes.' Once through imprudence, his daughters left a bath in his room which he instantly utilized past recovery as a receptacle for literary matter heaped up and pressed down, shaken together and running over.<sup>24</sup> There was always a fire on the hearth the year round; for one of his persistent afflictions, whether due to opium or not, was his constant discomfort from cold. 'He had never been thoroughly warm all his life,'<sup>25</sup> he told Hogg, forgetful at least of the sufferings from heat in the summer of 1846 of which he complained so bitterly to his daughters. He had the quaint habit of carrying into his den every scrap of paper he could lay his hands on, any old envelope or newspaper, not infrequently under the pretext of 'burning it for you' in the fire-place. The gathering of scraps had become an instinct; and his notes were frequently scribbled on tiny odds and ends, the torn off flap of an envelope, or shapeless bits. The mass of notes to Messrs. Hogg during the years in which he was collecting his works

<sup>23</sup> Hogg, p. 178.

<sup>24</sup> Page, I, 390. See also *Sortilege on Behalf of the Glasgow Athenaeum, Works*, XIII, 251.

<sup>25</sup> Hogg, p. 184.

is largely made up of such strange missives.<sup>26</sup> It was not only economy that drove him to such shifts; rather, no doubt, it was his inability to find at the moment proper writing materials among the welter of his study. In his room, too, he took all his meals except dinner, alone; regularly anxious lest the tray upon which they were served should, in being set upon the table, disturb the litter of precious papers.

Mrs. Bairdsmith declares to us, 'He was not a reassuring man for nervous people to live with, as those nights were exceptions' — an obvious exaggeration even if founded on truth — 'on which he didn't set something on fire, the commonest incident being for some one to look up from work or book to say casually, "Papa, your hair is on fire," of which a calm "Is it, my love?" and a hand rubbing out the blaze was all the notice taken. One evening a maid rushed in upon two quiet girls with a horrified face and in a burst of smoke to announce that Mr. De Quincey's room, by this time on the point of being "snowed up," was on fire.' Frost had frozen all available water; but lest water should be found which might ruin his papers, De Quincey locked himself into his room; and by superhuman efforts smothered the flames with a rug. Naturally enough, wherever he lived, his welter of papers invited fires; and that he did not have serious accidents may be ascribed to the kindly gods.<sup>27</sup>

## v

WHILE we are assured by Dr. Eatwell in his careful diagnosis of De Quincey's case that from about the year 1845 he relinquished his excessive use of opium, and that the lesion of the stomach from which he suffered for so many years ceased to occasion him intense anguish, so that at the time of his death in 1859, Dr. Begbie, the attending physician, could discover in him no specific disease; yet he was not throughout those fourteen years free from all pain. He was constantly at Lass-

<sup>26</sup> Most of these MSS. are in my possession. 34 are in the Buffalo Public Library.

<sup>27</sup> Page, I, 364; cf. *Works*, III, 221 where De Quincey tells us that some 'five or six' dreams were burned 'in a sudden conflagration which arose from the spark of a candle falling unobserved amongst a very large pile of papers in a bedroom, when I was alone and reading.'

wade complaining of sensations as of 'rats gnawing in his stomach.' Hogg, indeed, ventures to believe that while De Quincey undoubtedly had sensations of pain, some of his complaints were the results of habit; and Hogg quotes a remark of John Wilson to De Quincey when the Opium Eater was paying Wilson a visit in his latter days: — 'You say [the rat] gnaws you. Why shouldn't he? Feed him, man, — feed him, and he won't bother you. The poor fellow is hungry. Come, let us give him some food at once.' And Wilson ordered soup on the spot and compelled De Quincey to swallow it. The gnawing disappeared; and 'we heard no more of the creature in the stomach.'<sup>28</sup> The implication that De Quincey did not eat enough to keep away hunger may be true. In his early days he often *could* not eat without pain; and now in later years he seems never to have had an appetite. By this time he had lost all his teeth; and bread in soup or tripe was all the nourishment he could take.<sup>29</sup>

But his stomach was not his only enemy. His was not naturally a cheerful disposition. Melancholy frequently settled upon him. Findlay more than once records these moods during De Quincey's last years — 'periods of despondency into which he occasionally fell, . . . the melancholy that was attached to looking back upon life.' For himself he said so 'stale, flat and unprofitable' was the retrospect that he turned away from it 'shuddering and ashamed.' Once Findlay met him walking in Edinburgh. 'I have come out to try whether the delightful air of this fine summer evening will do anything to dispel that intolerable languor and deep-seated suffering that distract me, and to which I have been a martyr for days.' Findlay urged him to go to dinner with him at Mr. Ritchie's. But, no, 'if he went he would be compelled by a desire to bring himself up to something like the common level of humanity, to take some stimulant, a little wine or spirits, and that for such indulgence, even to an amount which in any other person would be not only ordinary but trivial, he should afterwards suffer the pangs of hell. "Oh, my God," he exclaimed, "the miseries I have been born to endure; what tortures I have suffered, and what tortures am I yet doomed to

<sup>28</sup> Hogg, p. 197.

<sup>29</sup> Hogg, p. 247.

suffer." . . . Nothing, he said, but a large dose of laudanum gave him relief; that he took such a dose to enable him to get through a burst of work occasionally, but that he did not dare repeat it too often, and so in the intervals he had nothing for it but to endure.' <sup>80</sup> This was in 1854.

## VI

DURING these years at Lasswade, from 1847-54, exercise was De Quincey's most successful remedy for his woes. His biography has shown that at times he was a tremendous walker and that at other times he took no exercise whatever. Thus when he settled in at 42 Lothian Street for his last days, he again rarely went out for months together; yet, when need arose, he was able to cover the distance from Edinburgh to Lasswade without difficulty. Now, however, in this interval from 1847-54 walking became habitual, day and night. In the early fifties, young Hogg, frequently at Mavis Bush on business of the press, found him ready to walk back with him to Edinburgh at eleven o'clock at night; and they would part at the Newington toll-bar at one in the morning, De Quincey

<sup>80</sup> Findlay, p. 32. The last record of an opium struggle is dated 23 November 1848, after De Quincey's return from Glasgow to Lasswade.

'Mem. — That this day, Thursday, November 23, 1848 — being my 24th. of abstinence, — after having descended into utter despair, the 17th. to the 22nd. Nov. having been days of profoundest suffering and utter hopelessness — (rigid obstruction, throbbing without intermission, and sub-inflam.) — to my utter surprise the misery passed off after breakfast, not fully and consciously until about 1 or  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 1; so it continued until after cocoa, when for an hour or so a recoil of misery set in, which again passed off; and now,  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 11 at night, I am almost as well as bef. cocoa. On the 15th. day also (together with the day after or before) I had an intermission. But now it appears more strongly — that the cause of my misery must be the alcohol, and the restor. dependent on the offing obtained from this alcohol. — If this be the truth then it will go on: the advance will perhaps not be continuous, but intermitting and *per saltum*, but it will burst out more and more at intervals like a fugue until the restor. shall be perfect.' (BS. MSS.; Page, I, 354.)

But he continued to take laudanum to the end. The following note to Hogg in the Buffalo Public Library written about six months before his death is conclusive evidence: —

May 27, 1859.

My Dear Sir,

Having last night taken a powerful medicine, with which Laud<sup>m</sup> is quite incompatible, until the natural action of that med. is exhausted follows of necessity that no relief to my nervous misery can be tried hopefully or rationally before the signs become apparent of the renewed susceptibility for morpheutic action. — To-mor. is a day of Palingenesis.

(It is through Professor Willard H. Bonner that I learned of the Buffalo collection of De Quincey material.)

returning to Lasswade alone.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the seven miles to Edinburgh would tire him; and again Hogg records that often De Quincey would reach *The Titan* office thoroughly exhausted; but an opium pill or two would shortly make him 'as lively as a cricket,' ready for business or talk. Yet the fear of taxing his strength never deterred him from the road; and he would not infrequently arrange to meet a friend in Edinburgh and return with him to Lasswade on foot, as for example, Mr. Fields.<sup>32</sup>

## VII

DURING the Lasswade years, De Quincey lived a relatively normal life, surrounded by his daughters. He was genuinely fond of them and of their society, and they in turn made him as comfortable and as happy as it was in his nature to be. Of *their* life we have De Quincey's word in a letter to Miss Mitford. 'They live in the most absolute harmony I have ever witnessed. Such a sound as that of discussion in any shadow or degree I have not once heard issuing from their lips. And it gladdens me beyond measure that all day long I hear from their little drawing-room' — immediately over the den — 'intermitting sounds of gaiety and laughter, the most natural and spontaneous.'<sup>33</sup> Their daily pleasures were drawn from books and music. This letter was written to a mere letter-writing acquaintance, and De Quincey was drawing a fancy picture. But all the evidence bears him out in full measure.

His attitude towards them was gracious and kindly, perhaps a trifle condescending, as was his wont with women.<sup>34</sup> Jacox, the admiring and observing, tells of his 'unfailing habit of turning courteously to them and explaining . . . any casually

<sup>31</sup> *De Quincey and his Friends*, pp. 177 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Japp, p. 425; also, *Atlantic Monthly* (1863), XII, 364. And Page, II, 29 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Page, I, 331. Japp dates it 1842, but he is obviously in error.

<sup>34</sup> Not entirely *mal à propos* is the following anecdote from an unknown newspaper — the clipping sent me by Mrs. M. H. Robertson, 34 Westbourne Gardens, Glasgow. The anecdote 'was related by a gentleman who had charge of the census arrangements in Lasswade' in 1851. 'De Quincey had not filled in the census paper when the official came to take it up, and even then was quite at a loss to know what to do. Where was he to sign? What was his occupation, etc.? At length he inscribed his own name and entered himself as a 'writer to the magazines.' But when he came to the occupation

employed term from the "dead languages" which presumably might lie outside the pale of ladies' lore.' Or, again, when Southey's dictum was quoted, 'But gooseberry pie is best,' he turned to remind his daughters that Southey was parodying Pindar.<sup>85</sup> He knew that the girls were but casually educated in spite of their genuine taste for books and music; but if they had had more steady opportunities for learning, De Quincey would still have felt that education for women should be a very different thing from that for men. At least the two younger daughters became highly cultivated through native taste and ability, although Emily in her latter years wrote in a letter rather bitterly of her own ignorance and lack of training.<sup>86</sup>

After dinner, there usually was music by his two younger daughters. Fond as he was of music, however, he was not often in the room while it was going on; he was a good listener from his den downstairs, and would comment on his favourite selections when he rejoined the company. Beethoven in these years was alone the composer for whom his reverence was devout; Mendelssohn he could not like. But Bellini appealed to him, and Mozart, and certain ballads; Weber's 'Invitation to the Dance' and Pergolesi's 'Gloria.' So Jacox records. On one evening, Findlay relates, 'the young ladies played overtures and other pieces on the piano, one of which De Quincey particularly praised, saying that it soothed him like a delicious anodyne. Miss Florence remarked that it was a poor compliment to the music to say that it sent him to sleep. He explained to her, with burlesque excess of particularity and politeness — the humour of which he himself evidently enjoyed as keenly as the amused auditors . . . that [the music] was giving the greatest spiritual gratification, and being to him, for the time, the highest good, as making him, usually so miserable, temporarily happy; and therefore fulfilling its purpose, though not, perhaps, in the ordinary way or according to rule.'

of his family he was floored. What could the occupation of his three daughters be said to be? Finally taking up his pen, De Quincey put a bracket round the three names, and wrote against them — 'These are like the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin.'

<sup>85</sup> Page, I, 381.

<sup>86</sup> MS. in my possession.

The evenings were not all given to music, and he played his part in the family circle. His daughter, Florence, records, that often 'the newspaper was brought up, and he, telling in his own delightful way, rather than reading the news, would, on questions from this one and that of the party, often including young friends of his children, neighbours, or visitors from distant places, illuminate the subject with such wealth of memories, of old stories, of past or present experiences, of humour, of suggestion, even of prophecy, as by its very wealth makes it impossible to give any taste of it. It was the happiest flow of real conversation growing out of the circumstances of the moment, in which the youngest and shyest of the party, encouraged by his gentleness and power of sympathy, that made him catch in a moment what the stammering youth or maiden might wish to say, took their part.'<sup>87</sup>

### VIII

IN these years he was sought out by many visitors, some of whom became friends and correspondents, even though at the Lasswade end the writer of letters was more likely than not to be one of the daughters. There can be no doubt that he found pleasure in their visits and in the respect and interest which prompted them. Now and then he regretted 'the inroads on his time made by visitors;' but on the whole he was hospitably inclined, and his daughters were efficient and admirable hostesses. Those who came for a call were often kept for a meal; or even, now and then, for the night or longer. And unless he were absolutely incapacitated, he would do his best to entertain his guests.

One incident is recalled in a letter of Miss Emily De Quincey to James Hogg which is amusing in itself.<sup>88</sup> Miss De Quincey was writing of a parody of De Quincey's style in *Blackwood's* by a Colonel Hamley—a parody which she thought was prompted not so much by mere fun as by pique.

'Colonel Hamley (I think he was Captain Hamley then) had just written his novel *Lady Leigh's Widowhood*. He had come to Edinburgh, and some people thought and complained that he was rather on the lines of "starring it in the

<sup>87</sup> Page, I, 364.

<sup>88</sup> 3 August 1895. MS. in my possession.



Provinces." He happened to say to a friend of my father's in rather an off-hand tone, "I think of riding out to see old De Quincey." "I don't think you'll see him," was the rather gruff reply. "He lives a very retired life and is not well just now and will hardly see anyone." "Oh, but he'll see *me*." Quite unconscious of this conversation, one day I was seated in our little drawing-room, when I heard a sound most unusual in our quiet little valley. It was a sound of prancing steeds; five in all and they drew up at our little gate. I thought it was a party going to Roslin and had stopped to ask the way. Three people, however, came up and turned out to be Mr. and Mrs. John Blackwood and Colonel Hamley. Of course it was my father they wished to see, and my heart sank; for he really was not very well and I doubted his being able to be got under weigh. If it had been Mr. and Mrs. Blackwood, it would have been different, but his terror of strangers was sometimes not to be overcome. I put a bold face upon the matter and went down to rout him up. What was my anguish to see seated beside the dining-room fire such a figure of fun as I shall never forget. A catastrophe had happened with the chimney which ought to have been swept sooner. An avalanche of soot had come down completely enveloping the unfortunate author of my being. Two mournful eyes looked out of a completely black face. His coat off and a forlorn black shirt was adding to a hopeless state of mess and dirt to add to the scene. I was aware that a groom and two young ladies belonging to the party had a full view of the extraordinary black being who was pouring out his woes and his invectives against chimney sweeps in no measured strain. As to his coming up in such a state, it was impossible, and as to his cleaning himself up under a couple of hours with his deliberate motions was hopeless.'

Miss Emily therefore excused him as being unwell, longing the while to tell the whole truth, for all her life she had a lively sense of humour. She felt that her excuses were not well received and that Colonel Hamley took offence which resulted in the parody. But as she added to her letter,

'Any one who knows his [De Quincey's] courtesy would know that if it were possible he would have come up just to see Mrs. Blackwood for whom he had a great liking. . . . But surely a man's house is his castle where soot can descend and cover you at its own pleasure.'<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup> The article referred to in this passage is 'A Recent Confession of an Opium-Eater.' See *Blackwood's Magazine* (December 1886), XXX, 629; also Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 214.

## IX

WE catch glimpses of his strange meticulousness. In pauses of conversation in his study, he would take up a brush about ten inches long, and picking up page after page of manuscript and turning them in various directions, dust them off and lay them down with evident satisfaction. Again, he would go to Hogg's office with his papers, and bringing forth from one pocket of his Inverness cape the brush and from the other the roll of 'copy,' he would dust off any last traces of the sand which he had used for purposes of blotting, turn each leaf and brush it across and endwise, until Hogg's patience would give out. Then to Hogg's 'That will do now,' De Quincey would reply by a final touch, and surrender the manuscript with his little smile of amusement. From this same instinct, grew up another late habit. He was distressed over dirty money, coin, or paper. He would wash and polish pennies and shillings until they shone with pristine brightness. Only then would he give them out. And until he could find time to brighten them he would put dim coins into little packets. In the same spirit he took greasy and crumpled one pound notes, and after laboring to whiten them, would press them by putting them between the leaves of books. Thus after his death in Lothian Street several notes were found here and there through his library.<sup>40</sup> Such a concern was naturally possible only in the latter days when money was more plentiful than it had been in the preceding decades.

His shyness and sensitiveness grew upon him in later life. In earlier days he frequently boasted that he talked freely with anyone he met. But by these Lasswade years, he had come to shun strangers — and buses! James Payne had been to call upon him at Lasswade, and De Quincey had walked with him to the bus-station. Payne asked him if he ever went to Edinburgh by the bus. "'What,'" De Quincey exclaimed in a tone of extreme surprise; "by coach? Certainly not.'" Then De Quincey went on. "'Some years ago I was standing on the pier at Tarbet, on Loch Lomond,'" — he had apparently gone thither during his second stay in Glasgow — "waiting

<sup>40</sup> Page, II, 145; Japp, p. 431; Hogg, p. 162.

for the steamer. A stout old lady joined me; I felt that she would presently address me; and she did. Pointing to the smoke of the steamer which was making itself seen above the next headland, 'There she comes,' she said. 'La, sir! if you and I had seen that fifty years ago, how wonderful we should have thought it!' Now the same sort of thing," added my host with a shiver, "might happen to me any day, and that is why I always avoid a public conveyance." <sup>41</sup>

Among his neighbours, his sympathy and kindness drove him to action in which his shyness was forgotten. Miss Emily writes of a curious readiness to attend local funerals in these latter Lasswade days.

'The Scotch people,' she says, 'of all ranks invite people of all ranks to funerals. I think my father was too well known for them to take much notice of his not going. To upper class funerals he never went, but a sad case in the village aroused his sympathy. John Campbell, the shoemaker in the village had a *little* boy drowned. A notification arrived, and an invitation to the funeral. To our dismay, my father determined to go, though he had only a dark blue coat and a brown one. We thought the wearing of such colored garments at a funeral the people would take as an insult. However, he came up to show himself after he was dressed, — so very like a child, who did not quite like to do a thing he was warned against, and yet was determined to do it; and at length we were coaxed into agreeing that "the coat was not so very blue." But when he got out into the open the bridegroom-like blueness of the coat made us look at each other and sadly smile. Strange to say, the very people that one would have expected to stand most on attention to such matters took no notice; but the little blue figure, amid all the trappings of woe, was taken as much loving care of as the silent little corpse in the coffin.

He was greatly interested in the ceremony. . . . After that breaking of the ice he was inclined to attend funerals, and his brown or blue coat was, I think, rather an interesting novelty, and generally regarded as such. At length came a day when he went over to Glasgow. The father of an old servant of ours — a carter at Mr. Annandale's mill — lost a little child in scarlet fever. An invitation to the funeral was sent in my father's absence; and he never heard of it till afterwards when he returned. He, however, to make up, wrote such a really touching and beautiful letter, that we were told the poor man had it framed and hung up over his chimney-piece.' <sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Japp, p. 438.

<sup>42</sup> Japp, p. 440.

## X

FINDLAY made De Quincey's acquaintance, on 10 January 1852; and he and Burton from time to time thereafter went to Lasswade for dinner or an evening. On the nineteenth following they were asked to dinner.

'At dinner we talked on ordinary topics in which small and table-talk De Quincey was always as ready to join as in the most abstruse discussion. He took an interest in, and kept himself up with, all the current topics of the day; knew the latest accident and incident reported in the newspapers, as well as the minutest occurrences recorded in the lives of distinguished characters of past generations.'<sup>48</sup>

The conversation, after getting into deep literary waters, turned to the habit of all ecclesiastical sects to abuse and denounce their rivals, and the ease with which they fasten upon those rivals Scriptural symbols of reprobation.

"I think," said De Quincey, "it would be a very easy task for any one possessed of ordinary powers of research, and some knowledge of the great Antichrist controversy, by the exercise of moderate ingenuity to fix down all the marks of Antichrist — of course you don't for a moment suppose that I in the slightest degree believe in the popular notion and theory of Antichrist — but certainly all the popular signs and characteristics of Antichrist might be readily fixed down upon the Presbyterian Church of Scotland." In uttering this and other startling propositions, his manner and tone were entirely placid.

'Once, after some pause in the conversation, De Quincey and Burton began to talk at the same moment. Burton, of course, gave way. This, however, De Quincey would not permit, and after a struggle in politeness, De Quincey won; but when Burton had finished uttering his thought, De Quincey had totally forgotten his — so that he was led on to a humorous lamentation over his lost idea, 'unquestionably,' as he said, 'a brilliant and original one, which might have shed light upon some of the great questions that perplex the world. . . .'

'In the course of the evening, a curious episode occurred. The perfect quiet of the rural roadway or lane was suddenly broken by the sound of children's voices singing. The whole household went to the door, and found in the little garden plot a party of "guisers," who, their song finished, were sent away with a small gratuity. Whilst the little group, including the

<sup>48</sup> Findlay, p. 12.

ladies and the maid-servants, were gathered in the doorway looking at and listening to the children singing, De Quincey stood silent, and appeared to have lapsed into a sort of dream, which abstracted state continued for a few minutes after our return to the dining-room. He had evidently misunderstood the character of his visitors, and instead of rightly regarding them as village children on an evening frolic, fancied that they were in actual distress, and making a somewhat peculiar and more than usually clamorous appeal for charity. Silence was strikingly broken by his exclaiming, "All that I have ever had enjoyment of in life, the charms of friendship, the smiles of women, and the joys of wine, seem to rise up to reproach me for my happiness when I see such misery, and think there is so much of it in the world."

He was always touched by the sufferings of the poor, especially of children. Mrs. Bairdsmith writes, 'His presence at home was the signal for a crowd of beggars, among whom borrowed babies and drunken old women were sure of the largest share of his sympathy; but he refused it to none, and he was often wearied by the necessity he laid upon himself of listening to all the woes which were heaped upon him.'<sup>44</sup>

On 10 November 1853 Findlay again went to Lasswade with Burton and Mr. R. M. Craig who later married Margaret De Quincey. It was the one occasion on which Findlay found De Quincey 'languid and dull.' But after dinner 'he brightened up, and we had some good talk about Dr. Johnson.' Jacox in 1852 heard similar conversation.

'Of current literature, and men of letters past and present, [De Quincey] talked on that day, and on subsequent ones, with freedom and vivacity. With interest he heard that Professor Wilson, ailing as he was, had been driven into Edinburgh expressly to record his vote for Macaulay; and much he had to tell me of Christopher North and his ways, and of their joint association with the Lakes and with *Blackwood*. One quarrel he had with his old comrade-in-arms — for that magazine was politically a militant one — was his trick of spoiling a story in the telling. "For example, when I had lodgings over Waterloo Bridge, near the Surrey Theatre, in 1814, every night towards twelve o'clock a terrific din was caused in and around the play-house by the explosion scene in a piece that involved the burning of the Kremlin; regularly, to a minute, that explosion awoke a contiguous cock; this cock, in full crow, awoke an-

<sup>44</sup> Page, I, 362. Jacox writes to the same effect, Page, I, 386.

other; the second cock, a third, and the definite three an indefinite chorus, or antiphony, of others; which chorus, again, awoke and provoked a corresponding series of dogs; and so on with other clamorous voices in succession — gradually swelling the aggregate of tumultuous forces. Now, when Professor Wilson, who found my story of the midnight din amusing, retold it in his own vigorous but inaccurate fashion, he spoilt the effect by making the uproar synchronous, instead of gradually successive.” . . .

‘Of Talfourd, Mr. De Quincey spoke with evident regard, but thought his “*Ion*” considerably overrated. He was emphatic in praise of Harriet Lee’s “*The German’s Tale*,” as being almost unequalled in narrative skill, so artistic in the arrangement of the story, and so exquisite the delineation of Josephine’s character. “I had believed Miss Lee to have been dead long since, or I should certainly have called upon her in Bath, to offer her my personal respects and to express my gratification at her intellectual prowess.”<sup>45</sup> As, to his own regret, he had assumed Miss Lee to be dead, equally so, in another case, he had assumed Mr. Gillman to be alive when his review of the “*Life of Coleridge*” was contributed to *Blackwood*. “Lockhart wrote to Wilson, ‘What does De Quincey mean by attacking in that sort of way a man in his grave?’ Now this, when told me, was the first intimation I had of Mr. Gillman’s death.”’

On Sunday, the 25th of July, after Jacox had returned from church, De Quincey talked of the service,

and showed how far his sympathies went with a moderately ornate ritual. Sound Church of England man as it was his great right and pride to call himself, he avowed that his antagonism to Rome was mainly as a political system. . . . During our walk together into Edinburgh on the day of my finally quitting Mavis Bush, he expatiated with unprecedented animation on German theology of the advanced school, and freely recognised the “enormity” of the difficulties which rigid orthodoxy had to confront. Passing on to speak of practical difficulties, he said, “Frightfully perplexed I am, to this hour, as to what constitutes the so-called *appropriation* of the benefits of Christ’s death. Never could I get any one to clear it up to me. Coleridge was utterly vague on the subject. He talked all about and about it, but never talked it out, that I could discover. Often

<sup>45</sup> Page, I, 383 ff. Miss Emily De Quincey wrote Mr. H. S. Salt on 24 July 1907: — ‘I think no one will make much out of my father who does not take in the extreme mixture of childish folly joined to a great intellect. The novels of his youth were of the Mrs. Radcliffe order full of mysteries, murders, high-waymen, and dark corners.’

have I discussed the question with my mother, a clear-headed and thoughtful woman, devoted to the Evangelical system, and a devout supporter of 'The Record' — which paper I honour, as, in the other extreme, but for the same reason, I do 'The Leader,' for its candid and obvious earnestness in enforcing the views it has so sincerely at heart — but she would utterly fail to comprehend my difficulties. 'My dear child,' she would repeat, 'you have simply to trust in the blood of Christ.' 'Very well,' I would reply, 'and I am quite willing; I reverence Christ; but what does this trusting mean? How am I to know exactly what to do? Upon what specifically am I to take hold to support me when flesh and heart faileth, in the hour of death, and at the hour of judgment?' Countless different schemes there are to expound this doctrine of trust and appropriation; but they remind me of the ancilia at Rome, the eleven copies of the sacred shield or palladium: to prevent the true one being stolen the eleven were made exactly like it. So with the *true* doctrine of the atonement: it is lurking among the others that look like it, but who is to say *which* of them all it is? " ' 46

Later as he walked with Jacox along Princes Street to the Mound on his way towards Lasswade, Jacox noticed the nervous solicitude with which he refrained from any gesture while passing a cab-stand, lest a cabby should think he was in want of a cab. He evidently had a dread of the 'overbearing brutality of these men.' He stopped to look at French and German books in Seton's window, glancing from volume to volume with a comment upon each. He talked of Hawthorne, and of Emerson who had recently visited Edinburgh, with very qualified admiration; although later, after reading *The Scarlet Letter* and *Mosses from an old Manse* he came to admire Hawthorne. And Jacox having bought a copy of the *Mosses* for one of the De Quincey daughters, sent him on his way and watched 'that receding figure, as it dimmed in the distance.' 'The last I saw of him,' Jacox goes on, 'he had opened Hawthorne's book, and went along reading as he walked.' 47 It happened to be the last sight of De Quincey that Jacox ever had.

46 Page, I, 391 ff.

47 Page, I, 394 ff.

CHAPTER XXIII  
THE COLLECTED WORKS

1850-1859

I

IN THE spring of 1850, urged by some reason known only to himself, De Quincey made an important move. He sent a contribution to *Hogg's Weekly Instructor*,<sup>1</sup> an essay on *Conversation*, not to be confused with the paper on the same subject printed in *Tait* in 1847; and after its acceptance, he went in person to James Hogg, the publisher, with another manuscript in his pocket, that of *The Sphinx's Riddle*.

De Quincey walked into Edinburgh from Lasswade and called at the office of *Hogg's Instructor*. The elder Hogg was absent at the printing-office at Cannonmills, and De Quincey followed him thither. The two men had not met before, and Hogg has left an account of their interview. 'I was confronted,' he wrote, 'by a noticeably small figure, attired in a capacious garment which was much too large, and which served the purpose of both under and over-coat. . . . It was some time before the extreme refinement of the face was noticed — not, indeed, till the voice, gentle, clear, and silvery, began to be heard; when the eye ceased to be diverted by a certain oddity in the general appearance, and was attracted by the brow which, from its prominence, gave an aspect of almost childish smallness to the under face, and by the eyes, which combined a singular power of quiet scrutiny with a sort of dreamy softness that suggested something of weariness.'<sup>2</sup>

Then 'with an air of quiet good breeding' De Quincey

<sup>1</sup> There seems to be considerable confusion here as to dates. Hogg, the elder, says that this move was in 1849 (Page, II, 1); Masson (*De Quincey's Works*, VI, 139n.) declares that *The Theban Sphinx* appeared in the *Instructor* in 1849. 1850 is the correct date.

Incidentally, *The Theban Sphinx* was not the first paper to appear in *Hogg's Instructor*. In 1850, in the number preceding that in which *The Theban Sphinx* appeared, was printed an essay on *Conversation*. This presumably had been submitted by post or messenger, so that when De Quincey carried the manuscript of the *Sphinx* himself to Hogg, Hogg and he met for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> Page, II, 1.



opened the interview with the studied tact, the formal approach, which we should have expected. 'He expressed his satisfaction at the manner in which that work [*Instructor*] had been conducted; said he was pleased with its non-political and non-sectarian character; and, if there was a vacancy on the staff, he would like to become an occasional contributor.' Hogg gladly accepted the proposal, and directed De Quincey back to his son at the Edinburgh office to receive pay for the manuscript which he had with him. There De Quincey found the young man, sat down, and began to talk on the subject of the paper; and he continued to talk for more than an hour 'with fervor on the grandeur and gloom of the old-world story,' of the Sphinx. Then rested, he started back to cover the seven miles to Lasswade.<sup>3</sup> Thus began the connexion which lasted for the rest of De Quincey's life. Henceforth, with the single exception of an article in *Tait* in 1851, his new essays were printed in the Hogg publications, *Hogg's Weekly Instructor* and *The Titan*; and the collected works which were soon to follow were published by the firm of James Hogg.<sup>4</sup> For the next three years, from 1850-3, appeared some nineteen articles in the *Instructor*; in 1856-7 appeared seven essays in *Titan*; but the *Works* mostly kept him busy throughout his last years.<sup>5</sup>

Certain it is that the Hogs were born under a lucky star, in that without any effort on their part, De Quincey turned to them; and the house was astute enough to recognize its good fortune and clever enough to take advantage of it. It was a small concern; the magazine, the *Instructor*,<sup>6</sup> was in no way notable. The Hogs, however, for that very reason were the better able, were the more impelled, to pay much attention to their strange and eminent contributor and to encourage him with the personal consideration which he needed, so that the relationship became agreeable and fruitful for both De Quincey and the Hogs. The Hogs were good business men in

<sup>3</sup> James Hogg, the younger, *De Quincey and his Friends*, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> This is the firm name on the title page of the early volumes of *Selections Grave and Gay*, although apparently some time before 1858 the firm name was changed to James Hogg and Sons.

<sup>5</sup> J. A. Green, *De Quincey Bibliography*, pp. 18 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (1930), p. 326.

that they were able to understand De Quincey's peculiar character and habits and to remain patient and tactfully stimulating.

James Hogg, the elder, almost at once conceived the idea of gaining De Quincey's co-operation in gathering together his scattered papers in a series of volumes. 'The project of the collected works was talked of in the earlier stages of our acquaintance,' he wrote.<sup>7</sup> But presumably, De Quincey had thought of the possibility long before Hogg. He had again and again considered putting forth into book form some of his magazine articles. He had suggested to Blackwood that a collection of his historical papers be so assembled. Furthermore, he was fully aware that he had contributed to the prose of the time matter of importance. For the past decade he had been receiving letters of appreciation from admirers, not only from within the British Isles, but from America and the remoter British colonies.<sup>8</sup> But the accomplishment of a collection would have been impossible for him, had it not been for two facts. The one was the interest of Hogg; the other, even more potent, was the appearance of the opening volumes of a collected edition of De Quincey's writings put forth by the firm of Ticknor and Fields in Boston, Massachusetts.

The American public was genuinely interested in the better and more popular English authors; and Ticknor and Fields were keen enough to see in the current classics good business and a chance for leadership in the American publishing world. In the last century, the copyright laws of the United States gave absolutely no protection to English writers, so that legally American publishing houses were free to reprint anything they chose without consent or compensation, a situation of which too many took shameless advantage. Fortunately, Messrs. Ticknor and Fields had other ethics. They

<sup>7</sup> Page, II, 3.

<sup>8</sup> 'During the fourteen last years, I have received from many quarters in England, in Ireland, in the British Colonies, and in the United States, a series of letters expressing a far profounder interest in papers written by myself than any which I could ever think myself entitled to look for. Had I, therefore, otherwise cherished no purposes of republication, it now became a duty of gratitude and respect to those numerous correspondents, that I should either republish the papers in question, or explain why I did not.' (Preface to *Autobiographic Sketches, Selections Grave and Gay*, Edinburgh, 1853, I, ix.)

proposed to publish De Quincey's works; but they had the courtesy first to ask De Quincey's consent and co-operation. More than once Mr. Fields wrote to De Quincey, but received no answer. Interested as De Quincey must have been by the proposal, he could not overcome his procrastination to reply.<sup>9</sup> Having waited in vain for De Quincey's consent, and with the assumed obligation of sharing with De Quincey the profits of the venture, Ticknor and Fields proceeded to issue in 1851 the first of the twenty-two volumes to follow within the next eight years.<sup>10</sup>

The *American* edition was, indeed, a weighty argument for a *British* edition. The task of collection which up to this time had seemed impossible to De Quincey now became possible. In a letter to Ticknor and Fields, dated 8 January 1853, he thanked them for 'the services which you have already rendered me: viz., . . . in having brought together so widely scattered a collection — a difficulty which in my own hands by too painful an experience I had found from nervous depression to be absolutely insurmountable.'<sup>11</sup> The hour had come, with Ticknor and Fields blazing the way, and with Hogg at hand to aid.

But if De Quincey showed unexpected courage in undertaking so large a task, how about Hogg? His venture was almost as precarious and frightening as De Quincey's own; and he knew it. He tells us, 'It was said' — in various quarters when he announced the series of volumes — 'that I was engaging in an undertaking which I would never be able to complete. . . . But I persevered, and, by dint of patience and a way of humouring him, I succeeded. I soon discovered,

<sup>9</sup> In 1852, his daughter, Florence, wrote to Miss Quincy of Boston, 'We have given up all hope of any proper collection of his works ever being made, but now that it has been made in America, in the first place without his consent, simply because he never could muster energy to answer the letters which Mr. Fields very obligingly wrote several times before they began publication, he is very much pleased with it, particularly since he has seen and liked Mr. Fields so much, and the only regret is that he is too distant to make corrections.' (Florence De Quincey to Miss Quincy, 21 September 1852. Original formerly in the possession of the late Mr. J. P. Quincy.)

<sup>10</sup> Twenty-three volumes, if one includes the volume *Beauties of De Quincey*.

<sup>11</sup> First printed as a preface in the volume of the Boston edition entitled *Autobiographic Sketches*, 1853, pp. 5-8, a reprint from the first volume of *Selections Grave and Gay*, I and II.

however, that it was almost impossible to overrate difficulties — his whole constitution and habit of mind were averse from sustained and continuous work of the kind. He was constantly being caught with new plans, and when I was desirous of pushing on the publication of the works, would entertain me with the most ingenious devices and speculations — sometimes alighting on real practical needs, the supplying of which would have done something towards a fortune. I soon found that it was of no use to show impatience — that the causes of delay were for the most part beyond his control: that he did not lack the will to make efforts, but the power, and that the power was most amenable when he was left unharassed. A gentle reminder, an indirect suggestion, rather than an expression of one's disappointment was the most efficient spur to his will; for he was sympathetic and appreciative of gentleness beyond all men I have ever known.' <sup>12</sup>

The collected works were to bear the not too happy title, *Selections Grave and Gay from Writings Published and Unpublished*, a title, incidentally, which indicates that De Quincy had no intention of gathering together his *complete* works, but only those which might seem most interesting or amusing. And the next question was this: — Should he reprint the articles just as they had appeared in the magazines — as Ticknor and Fields were reissuing them; or should he revise or even rewrite them? In the first flush of the plan, there was but one thing he *could* do. The discursive mind was returning upon itself, often after thirty or thirty-five years, and was bound to be stimulated by self-criticism or driven to the addition of new thoughts. Especially was this true in connexion with the Autobiographic papers, the *Confessions* and the *Dreams* — those papers in which he was trying to give expression to subjective moods in which the rich garment of words and sweeping rhythms rather than inner facts tempted him to new efforts at precision. Whatever the reasons, such are the results. The early volumes — those of the categories named just above — were amazingly transformed; for better or worse as the case may be. But as the volumes continued to appear, more and more they came forth merely re-edited,

<sup>12</sup> Page, II, 3 ff.

often only re-proof-read. But appear they did, and the last volume, the fourteenth, was issued a month after his death. He had worked to the very end.

## II

HE looked upon the re-issue of his works as in full sense an original 'publication.' They had been, indeed, *printed* before, but printed merely as contributions to journals. 'Now,' De Quincey wrote, 'that mode of publication is unavoidably disadvantageous to a writer, except under unusual conditions. By its harsh peremptory punctuality, it drives a man into hurried writing, possibly into saying the thing that is not. . . . Here is one evil of journal-writing — viz., its overmastering precipitation. A second is — its effect at times in narrowing your publicity. . . . To take my own case as an illustration,' — he was referring to the *Autobiographic Sketches* which followed — 'these present sketches were published in a journal dedicated to purposes of political change such as many people thought revolutionary' — namely *Tait's Magazine*. 'I thought so myself, and did not go along with its politics. Inevitably that accident shut them out from the knowledge of a very large reading class. . . . According to the way here described, the papers now presented to the public, like many another set of papers nominally published, were *not* so in any substantial sense. Here, at home, they may be regarded as still unpublished.'<sup>18</sup>

Now, therefore, when he was consciously facing a larger public, or at least, a more unrestricted public, he could correct those defects forced upon him by 'overmastering precipitation' in the original composition and leave them more nearly perfect than earlier conditions made possible. He had always maintained, and, I believe, with truth, that given the circumstances at the moment, he had always done his best; but the conditional or momentary best was not always his absolute best, and he, more than any reader, was aware of the fact. Now was his opportunity to set his final seal upon his work; and he started out with vigour so to do.

<sup>18</sup> Preface to *Autobiographical Sketches, Selections Grave and Gay* (Edinburgh 1853), I, vi ff.

This can best be illustrated by his revision, or re-writing, of the *Confessions*. In the same Preface from which I have already quoted, he says: — the *Confessions* and *Suspiria* are ‘modes of impassioned prose ranging under no precedents that I am aware of in any literature. . . . As yet neither of these two works has ever received the least degree of that correction and pruning which both require so extensively; and of the *Suspiria*, not more than perhaps one-third has yet been printed. When both have been fully revised, I shall feel myself entitled to ask for a more determinate adjudication on their claims as works of art. At present I feel authorised to make haughtier pretensions in right of their *conception* than I shall venture to do, under the peril of being supposed to characterise their *execution*.’<sup>14</sup> The implication is, of course, that when the time should come to revise those works, the execution would be raised to a level with their conception; and not less surely does he imply that he appreciated to the full their splendour and originality.

But he was not completely satisfied with the remaking. He wrote in a mood of distrust to his daughter, Emily, in regard to the revised *Confessions*, ‘there cannot be much doubt that here and there it [*The Confessions*] is enlivened, and so far improved. To justify the enormous labour it has cost me, most certainly it *ought* to be improved. And yet, reviewing the volume as a *whole*, now that I can look back from nearly the end to the beginning, greatly I doubt whether many readers will not prefer it in its original fragmentary state to its present full-blown development. . . . As a book of *amusement* it is undoubtedly improved; what I doubt is, whether also as a book to *impress*. . . . Here, again, as in thousands of similar cases, is a conflict — is a call for a choice — between an almost *extempore* effort, having the faults, the carelessness, possibly the graces, of a fugitive inspiration — this on the one side, and on the other a studied and mature presentation of the same thoughts, facts, and feelings, but without the same benefit from extemporaneous excitement.’ Then he went on to doubt further, whether the enlarged *Confessions* was fit ‘to take its place among works addressing

themselves to the *popular* mind.' But the revision was done; the *Confessions* appeared in the collected *Works* more than doubled in length, and has become the classic form, in spite of the tendency of critics to agree with De Quincey in this mood of preferring the earlier and simpler version.<sup>15</sup>

The trouble which he took in the revision was great, and he toiled under handicaps. The improvement was won at a price of incredible labour and suffering.

'A nervous malady, of very peculiar character, which had attacked me intermittingly for the last eleven years, came on in May last [namely, 1856], almost concurrently with the commencement of this revision; and so obstinately has this malady pursued its noiseless, and what I may call its subterranean, siege, since none of the symptoms are externally manifested, that, although pretty nearly dedicating myself to this one solitary labour, and not intermitting or relaxing it for a single day, I have yet spent, within a very few days, six calendar months upon the re-cast of this one volume. . . . There was, meantime, another [difficulty], less open to remedy from my own uttermost efforts. All along I had relied upon a crowning grace, which I had reserved for the final pages of this volume, in a succession of some twenty or twenty-five dreams and noon-day visions, which had arisen under the latter stages of opium influence. These have disappeared; some under circumstances which allow me a reasonable prospect of recovering them; some unaccountably; and some dishonourably. Five or six, I believe, were burned in a conflagration which arose from the spark of a candle falling unobserved amongst a large pile of papers in a bedroom, when I was alone and reading. . . . Amongst the papers burned partially, but not so burned as to be absolutely irretrievable, was the "Daughter of Lebanon"; and this I have printed, and have intentionally placed it at the end, as appropriately closing a record in which the case of poor Ann the Outcast formed not only the most memorable and the most suggestively pathetic incident, but also *that* which, more than any other, coloured — or (more truly I should say) shaped, moulded and re-moulded, composed and decomposed — the great body of opium dreams.'<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Page, II, 110 ff. De Quincey interestingly supports the value of the revision by practical argument. The original *Confessions* and *Suspiria* would together make a volume of only about 120 pp., 'standing amongst sister volumes of 320 to 360 pp. . . . Such being the case, no remedy remained but that I should *doctor* the book, and expand it into a portliness that might countenance its price.' (Page, II, 110.)

<sup>16</sup> *Works*, III, 221 ff. Prefatory Notice to the new and enlarged edition of 1856.

He had, however, other motives for re-editing certain of the Works besides a desire for more adequate expression or for more artistic completeness. He was also concerned that passages of his papers which had unintentionally given offence to his former friends should be eliminated, so that unfortunate passages might not be perpetuated in the final form. The essay on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* needed modifying with an eye to Carlyle's feelings. The whole first part of the essay of 1824 was cut out in consequence. In the same way, he withdrew a page or two from the papers on Coleridge. Sometimes the original papers seemed to him too long, too discursive, even dull; and he cut accordingly.

## III

THE first volume of *Selections Grave and Gay* appeared, published and printed by James Hogg of Edinburgh, on 21 May 1853; a somewhat forbidding black-bound book with clear and pleasant enough pages. It would seem that the original intention was to limit the collection to ten volumes. As a matter of fact, thirteen were published before his death in 1859, and a fourteenth followed posthumously in January 1860.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The following dates of publication were sent to Japp by one of the Hoggs:

- Vol. 1. published May 21, 1853
- Vol. 2. published January 24, 1854
- Vol. 3. published June 9, 1854
- Vol. 4. published November 16, 1854
- Vol. 5. published November 13, 1856
- Vol. 6. published August 29, 1857
- Vol. 7. published December 12, 1857
- Vol. 8. published April 30, 1858
- Vol. 9. published October 18, 1858
- Vol. 10. published February 10, 1859
- Vol. 11. published May 6, 1859
- Vol. 12. published May 12, 1859
- Vol. 13. published July 11, 1859
- Vol. 14. published January 26, 1860. (MS. in my possession.).

Among the Hogg papers is a business statement of 12 August 1857, covering the first five volumes. De Quincey and the Hoggs are 'the joint and equal owners of the copyrights and proceeds,' and half the profits went to each party. De Quincey's share is summarized as follows:

Volume 1	£70..15..0
Do: 2d Ed.	1.. 6..3
Volume 2	73..17..10
Volume 3	64..16..0



On 23 January 1858 De Quincey sold all his rights in the *Selections Grave and Gay*, in the seven volumes already published and in three more volumes to follow; and also his rights in all articles already printed in magazines and elsewhere, to James Hogg and Sons, for the sum of £808.9.7. There was also added to the agreement the proviso that if De Quincey within the space of eighteen months had not prepared matter for the three volumes to follow, he should surrender the sum of £75 for each volume so unprepared. But he lived up to his contract, and in addition to the three volumes provided for, he also revised for the press four more volumes. What he received for these four extra volumes, I can only gather from inference; but since after the author was dead and the last volume was printed, James Hogg and Sons made over to De Quincey's heirs to close their account with the estate the sum of £50, it is safe to say that De Quincey received the sum of £50 for each of the four volumes. On this assumption, then, we can estimate that he received for the Collected Works about £1300; and this does not include the sums which Mr. James T. Fields gave him as his share in the American edition, sums which I do not know.<sup>18</sup> But I venture to guess that De Quincey in his old age, during the last decade, must have received from his writings not far from £2000.

One of the necessary preliminaries to such a collection of scattered papers as De Quincey and Hogg were undertaking was permission to reprint articles from the various publications in which they had originally appeared. For the most

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Volume 4	34..11..0
Volume 5	45..13..6
making in all the total sum of £290..19..7d.	

In addition De Quincey had half interest in the following copies in stock: —

Volume 1, 2d. Ed.	219 copies
Volume 2, 2d. Ed.	444 copies
Volume 3	122 copies
Volume 4	379 copies
Volume 5, 2d. Ed.	935 copies.

On the other hand, the second edition of Volume 2 shows a balance against the work of £37..0..7d; and the second edition of Volume 5, a balance of £41..10..10d. (MS. in my possession.)

<sup>18</sup> Messrs. Houghton Mifflin Co., who succeeded to the business of Ticknor and Fields, tell me that they have no records of the sums paid to De Quincey.

part, there was no difficulty. As might have been supposed, the house of Blackwood was most generous.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, all concerned, except two, gave their consent. Of these two, the Messrs. Black, the publishers of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, refused to have De Quincey's articles on Pope and Shakespeare used; the proposal 'met with a morose and churlish refusal.'<sup>20</sup> Fortunately these papers were not vital to the venture. A more serious refusal came from the surviving partner of Taylor and Hessey, proprietors of the old *London Magazine*. The younger Hogg tells of the incident: — 'No sooner had the advertisements appeared giving notice of De Quincey's intention than my father received a letter from the late Mr. John Taylor' who peremptorily forbade the use of the articles in any edition of the author's works, and refused to argue the matter or to consider any possible arrangement. 'De Quincey at first said, thoughtfully, but somewhat dubiously, that he had not parted with the "Confessions" in any formal manner. At the same time gravely and serenely, indeed half-humourously, he said, "Well, if the 'Confessions' really are not mine, there is an end of everything. We cannot proceed without them!" It seemed a happy deliverance from a great deal of laborious, tormenting work which he had faced with reluctance and would be glad to get rid of.' De Quincey had never formally assigned the *Confessions* to Taylor and Hessey, nor had he ever claimed any rights in the work. When the *Confessions* were reprinted in book form in 1822, Taylor had made a present on no legal grounds of £20 to the author; and De Quincey neither authorized nor questioned the various reprints. James Hogg, the younger, consulted legal authority, and finding the case for De Quincey strong, gave Taylor seven days to withdraw his claim, or face an action calling upon him for 'count and reckoning' of all the profits accruing from the various editions of the *Confessions* issued under his authority. The result was Taylor's withdrawal from his position on the grounds that De Quin-

<sup>19</sup> It was especially generous under the conditions preceding the publication in 1853.

<sup>20</sup> Note of De Quincey to Hogg, Friday, 3 September 1858. (MS. in my possession.)

cey and he were both old men, and that conflict would be unseemly.<sup>21</sup>

## IV

DURING the years of revision and rewriting, his original productions fell off in number. Still there were a few now and then for *Titan*, a continuation of *Hogg's Weekly Instructor*, edited by James Hogg, junior, and selling for half a crown. De Quincey was only too ready to assist with his pen. Hogg tells us, 'I should have been glad indeed to have had [the offered articles] for *Titan*, but for fear of allowing the Author to wander too far from the ever-present and irksome *Works*. Any possible escape — even through other downright hard work, from this perplexing labour was joyfully hailed by him as a hopeful chance of obtaining a prosperous holiday.'<sup>22</sup> But the son was too aware of the difficulties of his father in

<sup>21</sup> Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, pp. 201 ff.

Naturally enough, De Quincey had no list of his scattered papers. He turned in one case to a young admirer whom he knew only by correspondence, the Reverend Francis Jacox, who had become an enthusiastic disciple in his school days, and asked for help. In 1850 or 1851, as Jacox writes, De Quincey 'had forwarded to me a list of his remembered and recognised contributions to periodical literature, with a view to collect and reprint them, or at least a selection from them, requesting me at the same time to make additions to the list, if, from internal evidence, I could, — it was in my power to more than double the total.' (Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends*, pp. 219 f.)

It is a curious fact, that in spite of the Boston edition with its most careful editing and printing, there is perceivable no relation between the two concurrent series of volumes as regards selection or arrangement. On the other hand, De Quincey found the Boston volumes useful as copy, finding them easier to handle than the magazines of original publication. Among the Hogg manuscripts in my possession there are not a few passages, such as: — 'there remain 27 pp. of the Amer. Ed. viz. from p. 101 to 127.' 'It is a most vexatious thing that precisely this vol. of the Amer. Ed. (lettered at Boston as *Note-Book*) is missing; and I now (having also been for the last two hours) am in search of it.'

At least in one case, an oversight in the Boston edition is perpetuated by De Quincey in his own. In *Essays on Philosophical Writers*, I, 198 (Boston, 1856), the closing words of the letter, the signature, 'Grasmeriensis Teutonizans' and the postscript of the article on Richter originally printed in *The London Magazine*, were omitted. In *Selections Grave and Gay*, vol. XIV, the article is similarly truncated. Obviously the essay was being reproduced from the Boston volume. Had De Quincey lived to see the proofs completely through the press, this omission might, of course, have been corrected. (See Masson, *Works*, XI, 272n.)

'The Traditions of the Rabbins' by George Croly was included in vol. XIV of the *Selections Grave and Gay*. Since this volume was posthumous, it would seem that the article was added by Hogg to fill out the volume and that De Quincey never passed upon it.

<sup>22</sup> De Quincey, *Uncollected Writings*, I, xvii.

forwarding the major work to accept often the contributions; so that he checked De Quincey's enthusiasm for distracting papers as much as possible.

De Quincey's desire to write, however, was partly due, at least, to need of extra money. The following note to the younger Hogg is among the Hogg MSS:

*Private*

Wedn. Oct. 14.

My dear Sir,

I am *now* (i.e. since yesterday) laying aside the *book* for a short art. in *Titan*. Upon which let me make an explanation which, though familiar to myself, may perhaps not be so to you and which, not considered, might give a character of caprice to my change of movement: whereas mere necessity it is that prompts it. The last volumes of *Selections* have all been applied — their profits, I mean — to the payment of the extra costs incident to leaving a home [viz. Lasswade] where I pay nothing. This arrangemt. for which nobody is to blame, is for me a mere necessity: consequently were it not for contributions to *Titan*, I could not pay my running accts. at this place [42 Lothian Street]. This I mention — to show the necessity of my pausing for 3 or 4 days. Yet on the other hand, if there is any *special* embarrassment to the Press in a partic. case that might cost only a few hours to right — of course on knowing of it, I will do so.' <sup>23</sup>

Now and then, he was unable in his attempted new papers to write up to the level which would satisfy himself. In a note to Hogg, the younger, he enclosed a postscript. The date is April 14 [1856].

'P.S. I am sure you will do me the justice to believe that I have done my best. But the result I fear is bad — and this from various causes. It is also *dreadfully too long*. It is therefore with perfect sincerity that I propose as follows: — That the whole should be cancelled. And I will most cheerfully undertake to write such papers for *Titan* as will reimburse the loss which in that case you will have sustained by the costs of the Press. — Every man is liable to some failures: and this, I fear, is one of mine; but a most unwilling one; and in part owing to *lumbago*, which at times prevents my rising from my chair.' <sup>24</sup>

Even larger plans, involving more than an extra occasional paper to pay his living expenses at 42 Lothian Street were

<sup>23</sup> MS. in my possession.

<sup>24</sup> MS. in my possession.

buzzing in his head. Hogg relates some of his schemes as they came out in conversation — and Jacox independently confirms him; plans so extravagant that Hogg doubted 'whether he was not hoaxing you and hoaxing himself at the same time, so absurd were many of the propositions propounded with an air of gravity and assurance of conviction unparalleled. . . . Though he was now over seventy years of age, and was engaged with the "Collected Works," of which some three volumes were still to do [namely in 1858] he would entertain me with details of a magnificent project to do the greatest work that had ever been done — the "History of England" in twelve volumes. The history of England, he said, had never been written as it should be written. Froude's History was the only one that approached his ideal. . . . When I asked him about the time we should need to live to see this done, he would say, "The *Collected Works* will be finished by such and such a date; I shall knock them off quickly so as to let me begin. Provided that you will undertake the narrative portion of the work, I will follow up with the pictorial description of all prominent characters. We can thus easily produce three volumes in a year, so that it could be done in four years at furthest." And so, with persistent repetition, he would dwell on his great scheme, and go over and over its details, adding another theme to that endless subject, "Memoirs of the Unborn," which he himself once thought of writing. It is true, we never proceeded so far as to fix the size or style of the volumes!' <sup>25</sup>

Jacox says that it was of 'a philosophical history of England, perhaps up to the period when Macaulay begins' that he chiefly talked, although Froude had covered a good deal of the earlier stretch; yet of Macaulay he held no high opinion. In addition, Jacox reports that in 1853 he was planning another novel, 'about two prisoners in Austria, in the time of Maria Teresa.' <sup>26</sup> The fact is, that in spite of all his difficulties in writing he had become so such a man of letters, that to write or to plan to write had become a necessity for him.

<sup>25</sup> Page, II, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Page, I, 393. The idea of the History was in De Quincey's mind for at least six years, since Jacox is recording conversations in 1852, and Hogg in 1858.

CHAPTER XXIV  
42 LOTHIAN STREET

1854-1859

I

IN EARLY June 1854 De Quincey transferred himself to 42 Lothian Street. There were at least two good reasons for this remove. In the first place, the *Selections Grave and Gay* were well started, and the seven miles between Edinburgh and Lasswade were a positive handicap in the exchange of copy and proof. In the second place, in that summer of 1854 a grandchild was expected at Pegsborough where his oldest daughter, married to Mr. Craig, was living, and his younger daughters wanted to be at hand at the birth. It would seem that De Quincey shifted his residence without consulting them, realizing that they would offer objections and yet wishing to leave them free for Ireland. Certainly they left Lasswade in August.

De Quincey's method of taking up lodgings on Lothian Street, near the University, in a house still standing today and marked with a plaque as the home of his last days, was characteristic. Mr. Findlay gives the story: — De Quincey 'had walked into town from Lasswade to these lodgings where he had been some years before, without any preparation in the way of luggage or otherwise; and he explained to me if it had not been that his landlady, Mrs. Wilson, being a conscientious and careful woman, had preserved for him a quantity of clothing which he had left on his former sojourn, he would have been in sore straits for dress.'<sup>1</sup> Here his temporary residence became permanent, with short intervals of absence of not more than a few months, all told, from 1854 to the end of 1859, when he died. He had previously stayed for a while at 42 Lothian Street in 1837, having left his family in Holyrood; for as Mrs. Wilson's sister, Miss Stark, wrote to Emily many years after, 'You young children was noisy and he could not

<sup>1</sup> Findlay, p. 40.

study.' <sup>2</sup> It must then have been for some sixteen or seventeen years that Mrs. Wilson had preserved his clothes. She was indeed, a 'conscientious and careful' woman! And he must have had pleasant memories of her care if he now chose to return to her lodgings. At any rate, the choice was a happy one, and for his last five years he found Mrs. Wilson and her sister, Miss Stark, attentive and solicitous in every way, so that the two women became indissolubly and pleasantly associated with his final period. Of Mrs. Wilson we hear little; it was Miss Stark who attended to him mostly, carried notes for him, and called for him when he was dining out to make sure that he did not outstay his welcome at the end of long evenings. In return, De Quincey was most recognisant of her care and thoughtfulness.

He was always considerate of inferiors. An American visitor was asked at the dinner table at Mavis Bush by one of the Misses De Quincey for his opinion of Scotland and the Scotch. De Quincey, who had been in a kind of reverie, turned to them in a kindly, half-paternal manner and said, 'The servant that waits at my table is a Scotch girl. It may be that you have something severe to say about Scotland. I know that I like the English Church, but I never utter anything that might wound my servant. Heaven knows, that the lot of a poor servant-girl is hard enough, and if there is any person in the world of whose feelings I am especially tender, it is those of a female compelled to do for us our drudgery. Speak as freely as you choose, but please reserve your censure, if you have any, for the moments when she is absent from the room.' <sup>3</sup>

It was the same De Quincey who wrote to Hogg: — 'Miss Stark having been very unwell for the last two or three days, and very weak in consequence, I feel unwilling to burthen her with *both* books on a hot day. I have, therefore, sent what struck me as the most urgent, viz. (the Advocates' Library) Bentley's *Milton*.'

<sup>2</sup> Letter in my possession. The date of his going to Mrs. Wilson's was November.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Oliver White, quoted in Page, I, 375.

## II

IN the absence of his daughters from Lasswade in the autumn and early winter of 1854, De Quincey wrote to them a considerable number of letters; some passages are sufficiently revealing to be quoted.

Friday, September 29, 1854.

My dear Emily,

I received yesterday your letter announcing the good news from Tipperary. To-night or to-morrow I will write to M. I am glad, according to my ancient doctrine, that it is a *daughter* — not a son. For I differ altogether from Señor de Erauso (papa of Catalina) <sup>4</sup> on the question of comparative pretensions between sons and daughters. How the equation may stand in Biscay I cannot judge; but as regards our own insular world, I look upon boys as the true and dreadful nuisance of society. This little Tipperary thing, for instance, in less than ten or twelve months will be ready for use as the liveliest of playthings. But a surly boy, after sulking for five or six years without finding the proper use of his tongue, would be first beginning to suspect a pugnacious value in his fists. By the time when the new little Flor. (if such is to be her name) will have lived a long life, with incidents and thoughts enough to fill three octavos, the wretch of a boy would be dimly developing his first foggy ideas on the subject of orchard-robbing. I take considerable interest in the question of *name*. Eva is good, but not to my feeling so good when in combination as singly. Grace is a pet Irish name; but, I suppose, there is no excuse in any family tradition for this. — Ever yours affectionately.<sup>5</sup>

While it is impossible to quote all the letters almost entirely taken up with Eva, there is one which cannot be omitted. Written in May 1855, it is addressed to the infant herself, an expression of his love and peculiar sense of humour.

My dear Miss Craig,

I will make a new beginning. But why so? Simply for the reason that follows. There is in this house, 42 Lothian Street, a being (metaphysically speaking, I must not call him a *person*) who is not altogether a friend of mine, but far less an enemy, because systematically I extend toleration to all Jews, Cretans (though charged with lying), dwellers in Mesopotamia, Mahometans, Pagans, even to donkeys (provided they retire for the purpose of braying into a secluded study); in fact,

<sup>4</sup> In the *Spanish Military Nun*.

<sup>5</sup> Page, II, 82.



to all the world, except only atrocious duns convicted of a fourth offence, and obstinate performers on the bagpipes. Therefore, of course, I tolerate cats, of which race is the agent concerned in what I am going to report; for surely a cat stands far within the comprehensive circle of indulgence that I have traced. A few weeks ago I had a severe attack of influenza, which has obliged me ever since to lie down for an hour or two in the middle of the day. Naturally, in these circumstances, I sometimes doze a little. Waking suddenly from such a momentary lull, I became aware of a little drama in the very crisis of *catastrophe*. My letter to yourself lay extended on the breakfast tablecloth, close to it was a cream jug, and close to *that* a newly opened bottle of Tarling's metallic ink, and quietly reconnoitring his opportunities was the feline pet of the house, who is also the sole criminal and traitor of the house. My movement in waking must have alarmed him, — conscience made a coward of him, and off he bounced, upsetting — not the cream jug, which had been the secret magnet of his invasion — but Mr. Tarling's sixpenny-worth of chemistry. So much of the black deluge lodged upon the right-hand section of your letter as obliged me to condemn it for illegible; else it was all written clearly enough. The deluge extended to the extremities of several remote slips, so that you may chance to find memorials of the wretch's transgression weeks ahead in future letters. . .<sup>6</sup>

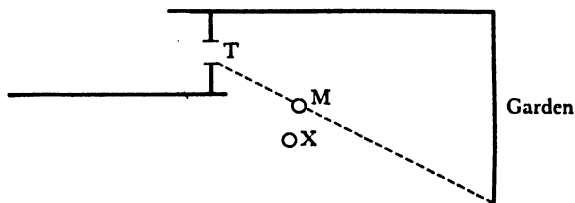
### III

AMONGST the letters to his daughters during their absence at Pegsborough is one of special interest; for in it he records at some length a dream, which he has not presented to the world in literary garb, and valuable, in consequence, by way of comparison. The letter is addressed to Emily; the dream, 'possibly symbolic, relating to Florence and yourself; which dream, whether significant or non-significant, occurred on Sunday morning.' The letter was written on Thursday, 11 January 1855.

### THE DREAM

This morning, being *Sunday*, a word unknown and unintelligible in this moorland, being in the native jargon, not unfamiliar, the *Sawbath*, — the hour (I should guess) 6 A.M., I had a dream, which dream was this. A door opened; it was a door on the *further* side of a spacious chamber. For a few

moments I waited expectingly, but not knowing *what* to expect. At length a voice said audibly and most distinctly, but not loudly, *Florence and Emily*, with the tone of one announcing an arrival. Soon after, but not immediately, entered Florence, but to my astonishment, no Emily. Florence wore a dress not as if coming off a journey, at least not a traveling dress, but a simple walking dress; she had on a bonnet, rather a pretty one, but I should doubt if it had cost more than half-a-guinea (unless they charge high in dreams); and it was lined with rose-coloured silk; but the ribbons, I think, were white (is *that* allowable?); and certainly the prevailing hue of the general dress was white. Florence did not look back; and how she accounted for Emily's not following is best known to herself. A shadow fell upon me, and a feeling of sadness, which increased continually as no Emily entered at the door, which, however, still stood open; so, you know, there was nothing to hinder her coming after all, if it was that she had only been loitering. But it relieved my feeling of sadness that Florence, of whose features I had the steadiest view, seemed cheerful, though not smiling. I felt it strange that I could not question her, notwithstanding that obliquely she was continually nearing my position. If I could catch her eye I felt that I could speak to her — not else; and this I could not do. What Florence was making for must have been a garden, still, solitary, and rich in excess of flowers past all counting, and gayer than any I had ever seen. The garden was on my right hand; the positions, in fact, were these: —



*T* is the door of entrance; *M* is Florence; *X* is myself in an unphilosophic mood of irritation, and, I fear, likely soon to become waspish if I should not succeed in arresting Florence's eye. However, I did *not* succeed; neither did Emily come so long as I staid, which might be six to eight minutes. Suddenly all vanished; the door, the garden, Florence, myself, all were gone; and I was broad awake, with no chance of ever intercepting the obstinate and unfilial Florence on her diagonal route to the flower-garden. I should mention, in order to complete the sketch, that although Florence continually advanced in the

sense of widening her distance from the entrance-door, nevertheless she never came nearer to me, for the chamber floor expanded concurrently with her steps, which is an awkward thing, you know, when walking a match against time. The garden, I should add, *melted* into the chamber, through steps of transition which were indescribable.

Had anything special occurred to fix my attention upon your name? Why, yes; on the night before (Saturday, January 6, 1855) a man had sent me, as a book that might amuse me, a novel in three vols., 2nd. edition, 1846, entitled 'The Lawyers in Love; or, Passages from the Life of a Chancery Barrister.' It is a most absurd and extravagant tale, but showing that kind of talent which belongs to the construction of a pantomime; and in this tale one of the heroines is called *Florence*.<sup>7</sup>

This dream, simple as it is, has certain characteristic qualities, — the 'spacious chamber'; the distinct but vague voice announcing 'Florence and Emily'; the definiteness of the figure: Florence's mysterious actions; the 'shadow' falling upon him, the 'feeling of sadness' increasing upon him as Emily did not appear; the inability to catch Florence's eye and to arrest her progress; the floor expanding 'concurrently with her steps.' Simple and lacking in grandeur as it is, it is of the same raw material which underlies his famous Fugues.

Two years later, during the terrible anxieties as to the Indian Mutiny and the situation of his daughter and her husband, his dreams became painfully vivid. In a letter to Emily on 1 November 1857 he wrote: — 'Up to the *last mail but one* (or briefly, in its Latin form up to the penultimate mail), I suffered in my nervous system to an extent that (except once in 1812) had not experimentally been made known to me as a possibility. Every night, oftentimes all night long, I had the same dream — a vision of children, most of them infants, but not all, the *first* rank being girls of five or six years old, who were standing in the air outside, but so as to touch the window; and I heard, or perhaps fancied that I heard, always the same dreadful word, *Delhi*, not then knowing that a word even more dreadful — Cawnpore — was still in arrear. This fierce shake to my nerves caused almost from the beginning a new symptom to expose itself (of which previously I had never had the faintest outline), viz., somnambulism; and now

every night, to my great alarm, I wake up to find myself at the window, which is sixteen feet from the nearest side of the bed. The horror was unspeakable from the hell-dog Nena or Nana; how if this fiend should get hold of Florence or her baby (now within seventeen days of completing her half-year)?' <sup>8</sup>

Again, how true to the type of the De Quinceyan dream! Little children in the air, touching the window; the dreadful word *Delhi*; the hell-dog!

#### IV

THE two unmarried daughters returned to Lasswade from Ireland about the middle of January 1855.<sup>9</sup> At the moment he was himself ill at 42 Lothian Street with some prevalent touch of influenza, soon cured by 'continued abstinence through three full days — during which time not two ounces' passed his lips. But on February 9 he was preparing to see them and to provide for them some entertainment. 'I am in deadly depression of nervousness; spite of which, however, I meditate great exertions; and (with the benefit of a daily nine or ten miles' exercise) I believe I could accomplish my plans. Towards these it is important for me to return home; and in the course of next week without fail I will do so. Meantime a wonderful sally of ingenuity has suggested to me that, by means of a previous concert between us, my return might be made available for a visit on *your* part to Edinburgh. You might come in by means of Cuthbert's carriage, for which, of course, I will pay, and take me up with my small quantum of baggage at *any* hour that suited you; i.e. at any hour from one to six. But let me know forty-eight hours before taking any final step in the matter. If one of the Miss Widnells [neighbours of Mavis Bush] should chance to find any motive for coming in on the same day, it would be easy for me to make room by taking my seat on a box of papers.

'Do not suppose that my delays in returning argue any uncertainty of plans.<sup>10</sup> The plain reason is my immeasurable

<sup>8</sup> Page, II, 132; BS. MSS.

<sup>9</sup> Page, II, 94.

<sup>10</sup> He had suggested that the girls return by December 18. They arrived about a month later. Now on February 9 he suggested that next week he would go home!

incapacity for business — above all, for that sort of business which lies in arranging papers or packing up books. However, if you or Emily will concert some scheme, I, on my part, will really make an effort.' <sup>11</sup>

If the girls were coming to Edinburgh to fetch him, why should they not all have a junket together? And happily 'Julien (or is it Jullien?)' was to give concerts next week. The tickets would cost half a guinea; Cuthbert's carriage 16 shillings; the whole, therefore, will at the outside — toll-bar included — not cost more than a guinea and a half, which he will pay, and without incurring any debt to Mr. Cuthbert. Tickets must be got early. 'There is always great crowding at these concerts, which (as you know) wear a vulgar, snob-bish character, but always offer the attractions of a severely selected and severely trained orchestra, and *partially* of good music. And on this particular occasion there is the *extra* (and to you and Em.) I should think inestimable attraction of Mme. Pleyell, the celestial pianofortist. Heaven nor earth has yet heard her equal. So say the London amateurs.' And, 'I guess, also, but doubtingly, that we shall have a moon.' He begged an answer by Monday. 'But do not send it over to Lasswade specially, at least by Ellen, for I gathered from her that at present you have but her in the house; and it is rather alarming to think of you two being left alone in a house so pestered with beggars, tramps and outcasts, whom desperate poverty tempts always to robbery, and tempts successfully when opportunity favours.' <sup>12</sup>

Then follows the brief and bare statement: — 'On Tuesday last I saw announced the death of Miss Wordsworth at the age of eighty-four. You would, of course, see the death of Miss Mitford. I was sincerely grieved.' One could wish that he had expressed some feeling at the death of Dorothy — she had meant so much to him in the old days. Or does 'I was sincerely grieved' apply to both Dorothy and Miss Mitford? Even so, his words seem cold.

But to return to the junket. On February 19 Miss Stark was actually on the way to Wood's music-shop to get tickets for the concert of Thursday the 22nd.<sup>13</sup> Then his plans

<sup>11</sup> Page, II, 95; BS. MSS.

<sup>12</sup> Page, II, 97.

<sup>13</sup> BS. MSS.

changed to the extent that he would join them on the morning, or noon, of the concert, at Mavis Bush, 'unless the snow should make it impossible.'<sup>14</sup> In that case they were to meet him in the city; and if, after the concert, a snowstorm should come on to bar their return, he could easily procure bedrooms for the party in a Princes Street hotel.<sup>15</sup> On the back of the letter he drew a plan of the location of his rooms at 42 Lothian Street, so that they could not miss finding him — sure evidence that his daughters had not visited his diggings before. The whole incident is full of his meticulous care for details which were always so much a part of his planning.

The Julien concert was the beginning of some little social activity. On March 2, eight days later, both he and his daughters were at an evening party at the Ritchies'. Yet the next morning he wrote a long letter to the girls, since on the previous evening he had found 'no natural or spontaneous opening . . . for my private communication,' to explain how he could *not* take them to hear Mendelssohn's 'Elijah.'<sup>16</sup>

He was constantly expecting soon to be in Lasswade. There is, however, no evidence that the visits were frequent. Yet he was now often eager to have his daughters come to Edinburgh; presumably because he was concerned with their lonely existence at Mavis Bush. On May 7, for example, he wrote to Emily, with a double kindly purpose. 'I am desirous of asking of you and Flor to come over some day according to your own convenience, for the purpose of calling on a young lady from Wales, a Miss M——, sister to a student at the College. She has come hither, viz., to these lodgings, with her brother, who had gone about a month since to fetch her. They returned after a fortnight's interval, and they seem lonely enough. She is musical and appears amiable. If you see no objection, it would be kind to take a little notice of her.'<sup>17</sup>

By May 14 his daughters were again away from home, visiting friends at Woodburn; and they were absent until some

<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, he was planning to walk out. In 1855 he was still walking regularly. In a letter of 24 June 1855 he wrote: — 'I have just returned from my daily walk of seven miles; not much certainly, but as much as I can find spirits for.' (Page, I, 368.)

<sup>15</sup> This letter is given in part only in Page, II, 99; BS. MSS.

<sup>16</sup> Page, II, 100; BS. MSS.

<sup>17</sup> Page, II, 103.

time in August. On July 31, in a letter to them, he declared his intention of moving out to Mavis Bush on the second of the new month, before they were expected back. Whether he actually went as planned, I do not know; but his two daughters soon returned preparatory to Florence's departure for India to marry Colonel Bairdsmith. Margaret with her baby joined them at Lasswade, so that De Quincey had his first sight this summer of his grand-daughter. Of this gathering we have the pictured record in the delightful drawing by Archer, and the Opium Eater must have felt the excitement and joy of the occasion. But in October he was back again at his lodgings; Florence was on her way to the East; Margaret and Eva were presumably back in Ireland; and Emily was once more away visiting. Lasswade was no place for Emily to remain alone. De Quincey in Edinburgh still remembered with delight the baby. 'She is the only baby of twelve months old that ever struck me as *arch*. . . . *Archness* . . . includes, necessarily, a certain amount of *conscious* fun.'

In the same letter he included an amusing paragraph:

'Did you ever hear of such folly as W. Sav. Landor is playing? It is much worse than if he offered £95 for cutting the throat of a *given* king or reigning prince. At present there is no limit to his summons, because under the terms of his offer, it will be a swindle if he hesitates to pay the money for *any* obnoxious public man whom the claimant may pronounce a tyrant. Since, if Mr. L. demurs, Assassin will say — Oh, if you limited the idea of *tyrant* to this man or that man, you should have said so; then I should have known where to look out for throats. As it is, you are a thimble-rigger. — What a miserable trick for courting a little bit of notoriety. — And with the same view they say that every week he is inserting in the London *Examiner* the most shocking ill-looking sonnets. The Sonnets must be tolerated: but as to the bounty on tyrannicide, — considering that more than 3 or 4 young gentlemen up and down Europe know themselves to be "wanted," as Policemen say, my opinion is that it won't be tolerated. Our gov't, if spoken to, *must* speak a word or two to Master Savage — who began life at Trin. Coll. Oxford by firing a pistol at the Revd. Mr. Horse Kett, and at present, 60 years later, seems to be ambitious of taking for his model my Toad-in-the-hole (in the second part of Murder One of the F. Arts) who in the enthusiasm of the moment begins to load with ball cartridge for the benefit

**PLATE VII. THOMAS DE QUINCEY, MARGARET HOLDING  
HER DAUGHTER, EVA, AND EMILY**

**1855**

**From a chalk drawing by J. Archer in the possession of  
Miss Bairdsmith, the daughter of Florence**





of friend and foe, until the whole company unite to kick him out. I fear the precedent adumbrates the entire case of Savage to the very end.<sup>18</sup>

## V

BETWEEN October 1855 and June 1856 there is a complete absence of letters. It would seem that for some eight months, De Quincey gave up his rooms at 42 Lothian Street and returned to live at Lasswade with his daughter, Emily. When, however, he resumed his residence in Edinburgh late in May 1856,<sup>19</sup> he went back with the specific task of revising the *Confessions*; and by the first of October he was so well advanced that he was again proposing that he should return to Mavis Bush, and suggesting that Emily who had gone again to Ireland should return to open the house for him.<sup>20</sup>

'When, on or about the 27th (I think it was) of July, I heard from you, not that you were going, but actually that you were going — going — *gone*, to that island of saints, first gem of the sea, green Erin, — verily I was struck as by a thunderbolt.'

But, surely he need not have been. Emily was apparently alone at Lasswade, and a new baby was expected at Pegsborough. However, he was merely jesting. He was mildly interested in the new arrival — far less interested than in the arrival of little Eva. But he inquired for the grandson tenderly.

'You never tell me anything of Mr. John Craig, *junior*. But I fear *junior* does not reach the depth of the case; it must be *natus minimus*, youngest, not younger, that will hit the bird I mean. You must understand that the Latin adjective *juvenis* (young) has a comparative degree, *juvenior* (and by contraction *junior*), younger. But very improperly it has no superlative, *juvenissimus*, and by contraction *junissimus*. The word was wanting to those haughty Romans, but not the thing. A youngest member of a family, a younger than a younger, did exist in Roman households, in defiance of old mumbling grammar and old toothless grammarians that suddenly found themselves bankrupt of proper words for expressing "oldest" and "youngest." Once in my hearing a man, who could not carry

<sup>18</sup> BS. MSS.; passage omitted by Page, II, 108.

<sup>19</sup> Page, II, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Page, II, 112. Eva married a Mr. Cocksedge and died in 1913 or 1914: the boy became Colonel Craig and died in April 1927.

into the understanding of a woman his very simple question, "Was the storey in which we stood the topmost in the whole house?" presented his question thus — "Supposing this house turned upside down, should we find ourselves in the cellar?" And so, there is no proper Latin word for "youngest," except the circuitous one of *natu minimus*, and yet the young gentleman aimed at is known to me only as youngest or most young, and any merely *junior* person will not answer, then I desire to vary my question thus — Supposing all relations of age to be exactly inverted, and all modes of kinship turned upside down, then understand that I am enquiring about a young gentleman that would in that case become grandfather to a writer on "Political Economy" in three volumes octavo. That grandfather, aged, I believe, about two and a half months, has he come as yet to the use of his distinguishing faculties? Does he notice any slight differences between a philosopher and a cabbage? And on what terms is he with Miss Eva, who originally, I think, threatened to do for him?'

## VI

By 6 November 1856 the *Confessions* were nearly finished, and he wrote to Emily in Ireland.

'Now, my dear Emily, the time is close at hand when, if you are quite disentangled from engagements, I should feel greatly obliged by your coming home. Yet stop! not *too* soon: pause a few days, and for the following reason. Several, to wit two (if not three), long letters — one, I think, dated two months ago, were written by me to yourself and to Mr. Craig. Unfortunately they both fell into a pile of papers, from which I never could extricate them without more serious trouble than the press labours would allow me. To-morrow, or maybe, to-night, I shall find them. But now, if you were to come away too suddenly, to whom could I send them? These elaborate letters will, in that case, want a reader, which is dreadful.'<sup>21</sup>

The summons in November was not mandatory; and Emily did not return. But once more, on 26 March 1857, De Quincey suggested that she should come home.

'If you please to imagine me not writing but talking through a diabolic speaking trumpet, I will utter my next sentiment in *Italics*; *Italics*, and nothing *but Italics*. Here the sentiment begins: — I am somewhat weary of Lothian Street. But should Lothian Street spitefully retort that she is weary of me, *that* happens to be impossible, as I can prove, for she has never seen

<sup>21</sup> BS. MSS.; Page, II, 119.

me. At the end of the penultimate (not the ultimate) week of May 1856, did I the underwritten, enter upon these Wilsonian rooms or room, out of which stirred have I not into any street or streetlet, only once excepted three or four weeks back, when I went to the theatre for the purpose of seeing and hearing Grisi, and under the impression (which now appears to have been a false impression) that on this planet she would not again be scenically revealed.' <sup>22</sup>

Weary he was for Lasswade; and he had been out of doors but once in ten months.<sup>23</sup> He had been busy with the *Confessions* up to November; since then he had not been steadily unwell. Why this seclusion? There is no answer.<sup>24</sup>

Emily, as always, when the need was imperative, returned to Mavis Bush. But De Quincey changed his mind. She had been at Lasswade a week, when he wrote to Hogg that *before* he should go thither he wished 'to make up one, or if possible two, volumes; the sixth and the seventh.' If he joined her at Lasswade he certainly did not stay long. The sixth volume was, on the stocks, to appear in August; and Emily could hardly remain alone in the solitude of Lasswade. In early summer she was off again to England, this time visiting the Gees and other relatives about Boston. There she was joined by her brother, 'Paul Fred (or as *he* reads the record, Fred Paul),' who had just landed from his service in India. Then together they returned to Lasswade on July 9, and immediately they began to concert plans with De Quincey for all three to invade Tipperary as soon as possible.<sup>25</sup> Strange to say De Quincey fell in with the proposal after the usual hesitation.

The thought of a possible trip to see Margaret and the two grandchildren had long been present in De Quincey's head. Some months earlier, he had hinted at one. A letter had reached him from Charleston, South Carolina, via Boston, Lasswade, Pegsborough,

<sup>22</sup> BS. MSS.; Page, II, 113.

<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Bairdsmith to J. R. Findlay; 22 March 1886. Findlay MSS.

<sup>24</sup> In a letter to Hogg, undated, but certainly in April 1857, De Quincey says that because, 'for many weeks my eyes have given me much pain, and consequently so much anxiety about the result, that at last I wrote my Daughter Emily—begging her to return to Lasswade. This she did last week.' (Page, II, 45.)

<sup>25</sup> Page, II, 138; Craig MSS.

' whose main request is, that I would "write one line that will permit (your own express permission I ardently desire) your name to Christianise my first-born son." But note, I am to send one line "that will contain one truth, one fact, or one great thought, which I can give to him when he begins to bud and blossom as a human thing." Truths run rather low with me at this moment; but I should think he would consider three falsehoods at *par* with one truth.'

Then De Quincey endeavoured to trace the distance which this 'Straw-coloured letter' had covered in reaching him. But he was uncertain of the Irish distances —

' in the dark about your Irish section of the journey; which however, is, at this present time, simply the most interesting route in Christendom, closing, as that vista does, in the little *Eicon* (if not *Basiliké*, yet doubtless) *Angeliké* of dear Eva. Most anxious I am to see her. And if I were destined to take no further journey in this life, supposing (I mean to say) that such a restriction upon my locomotive faculties were already entered into her adamantine ledger by the haughty lady Destiny, I should warn her of a probable *erratum* impending; one such erratum at the least, viz., involved in one journey to a certainty *ex voto* (i.e., in discharge of a vow made on hearing of her birth) to the shrine of her little holiness, Eva Margaret Craig. So far, at all events, if no further, I must rise in rebellion against any decree of the gloomy trinity, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, which should tend to draw an enchanter's circle of arrestment about my vagrancies ahead! ' 26

This plan of a visit to Pegsborough was not as completely visionary as the schemes of his youth to go to Canada, Germany, and Spain; although, as Mrs. Bairdsmith assures us, in his later days it was one of his childlike foibles to talk of journeying to foreign lands or of joining friends in their excursions.<sup>27</sup> But the Irish visit was a different matter, and it actually came off.

In a letter of July 11, there is an attractive passage:

' Now let me call your attention to a little matter, but which Mr. John, minimus, and Miss Eva may chance to regard as the weightiest matter in the whole letter.

' There is plenty of time for you to write and tell me what lit-

<sup>26</sup> Page, II, 137.

<sup>27</sup> Memls., II, 235. In 1853 he declared to Mr. O. W. Wright that he should be in Paris during the winter.

the thing there is which would be likely to meet some want or fancy or both. I am not at this moment so rich as in a month (or possibly less) I shall be. Consequently, what I wish for at this moment is something trivial as regards cost. Emily fancied perhaps a doll for Miss Eva, but I objected that her household of dolls is already mounted. As to books, a *tiger-book*, a *wolf-book*, an *elephant-book*, are what I have long been preparing, but I do not wish to spoil them by sending them prematurely. I am, in short, aground in my speculations on this point; but as there is time still for you to write a few lines of instruction to me, perhaps you will do so. At present (for take notice it is no longer Sunday — *that* is all used up — and in regard to the whole of this present page, *Tuesday*, or by all likelihood even Wednesday, unhappily may come to be the date) our plan is to leave this place on Wednesday, July 21, and to stay with you about eight, nine, or ten days. Fred and Emily came over this morning; and this was the arrangement proposed by Emily. For Johnny, your latest hope, my suggestion was that a rake, a spade, and a hammer, gimlet, and bag of nails might be a proper *nuzzur* to approach him with. But Emily thinks that even now he has more spades than I have. But if you can indicate any better implement of industry, or war, or skill, either here or at Belfast I will look out for it.' <sup>28</sup>

On July 21 the three started, crossed to Ireland, and stayed with the Craigs at Lisheen, whither they had removed, until early in August.<sup>29</sup> Then, once more back at 42 Lothian Street, De Quincey soon wrote to Margaret.

My dear M.,

This is a Friday night, and I, being in mood for chattering, with no obvious recipient on whom to bestow my tediousness, select yourself as one that cannot run away from the deluge. First, let me take a flying retrospect of our late visit to Lisheen, which to me has certainly been beneficial. You remarked a change of appearance; and since my resettling here this change has become more palpably marked in sleep, in dreaming, in appetite, and other circumstantialities of daily life. One remorse only I carry away from Lisheen, viz., that I did not kiss the little bonny mouth of Buddee. Mr. Craig in a slight way, at Goold's Cross, reproached me with this omission as if an oversight. But oversight it was not. The secret consideration which moved me to suppress the request (that else was on my lips) to visit his pillow, was the belief that Buddee slept in the

<sup>28</sup> Page, II, 139.

<sup>29</sup> De Quincey wrote on August 3 a letter to Mrs. Wilson forewarning her of his imminent return.

arms of Joanna, who, if a truly derived daughter of our sad old 'ganmama,' Eve, the orchard-breaker, would not relish this sudden intrusion upon her nocturnal deshabelle of a foreign-eering Protestant. True, that afterwards I saw Joanna in the hall; but this was at a moment of hurry and general valediction.

Let me rehearse the stages of our travelling experience. To Goold's Cross we drove under the restless faith that we were too late. But once at Mr. Goold's station, we found ourselves 'shunted' into the rearguard of those who are summoned to the exercise of patience by wearing the character of people foolishly and sneakingly too soon. Thus was realised for the thousandth time the word which the prophet spake at my birth — This man shall always be in time, and indeed basely in time; but, for all *that*, he shall never once escape the pangs of being too late. Cassandra, by a like fate, having consented to accept the gift of prophecy as a silent pledge that she would favour the amorous suit of Apollo, nevertheless jilted the indignant God. To recall his gift was impossible; but he poisoned it by the curse attached to her predictions that she should never be believed till it was too late to reap the benefits of the warning. Just so did the good fairy say to me on my natal morning, August 15, 1785 — 'My lad, I've a kind of liking for you; and herewith I make you a little present.' 'What is it, ma'am, if you please?' 'What is it? Why, if you *must* know, it is this: the most odious of vices, which men call procrastination, shall never dare to come near you.' 'Very true,' replied the bad fairy, who had seated her fat person on the other side of the bed, 'thru for you: procrastinate he shall not; he shall be the chief and the leader upon earth of all miso-procrastinators; but still he shall reap the two grand penalties of procrastination the very worst.' 'Indeed! you wicked old lady: and what penalties are those?' 'Why, these two: in midst of *too-soonness* he shall suffer the killing anxieties of *too-lateness*. In Dr. Donne's words —

He shall *dream* treason; and believe that he  
Meant to perform it; and confess, and die;  
And no record tell why.

Secondly, which is the other penalty, he shall suffer the endless reproach of procrastinating.' <sup>80</sup>

## VII

MEANTIME, on 28 June 1857, De Quincey first got news through the newspapers of the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny at Meerut on May 10. His son-in-law was in the Bengal En-

gineers, and his daughter and her baby were with him somewhere within the field of danger. The news naturally alarmed him; and he feverishly followed the accounts, inadequate as they were bound to be in those days of slow and imperfect communication. He wrote to Emily who was on a visit in England immediately.

Monday, June 29, 1857.

My dear Emily,

You doubtless are suffering under the same anxiety as myself about our poor dear Florence. Let me tell you all that I know, then do you write me as soon as possible all that you know. Yesterday (that is, Sunday, late in the evening) by pure accident Miss Stark came and asked me if I knew that late on Saturday there had been an important second or third edition published of the *Scotsman*. The *Daily Scotsman* is the particular paper which I take in; and on Saturday before eight in the morning I had received it as usual. At that hour there was no news stirring; but now it seemed some thing was wrong. *About China* Miss Stark thought. But I, upon occasion of the still to this hour unexplained and mysterious mutiny in the Native 34th Regiment, had a misgiving that it would be India. With great difficulty, day being Sunday, a copy of the Saturday-night edition was obtained; and it then appeared that India it was. Three regiments at Meerut had mutinied — 1 cavalry, 2 infantry; they had been attacked by our British regiments; beaten, but able to retreat upon Delhi, where (the Marseilles report was) they had massacred all *white* people.

All this you have heard, no doubt. Now tell me Colonel Baird Smith's last station; how is it named? But above all, how is it situated? Surely not on the route from Meerut to Delhi?

What I have *since* seen — viz., on this Monday — is an article in the *Daily News* (London paper) from its correspondent, not at Marseilles, but at Trieste. This article says that the mutiny had also broken out at Ferozepore (Fred's station, is it not?); two native regiments being specified as amongst the mutineers — viz., the 45th and 57th. But in the action which ensued between the revolters and the British, the Trieste report went on to say that the 10th (Native) Cavalry maintained their allegiance, and that in consequence the mutineers were 'broken and dispersed.' At *that* station the tide had evidently turned, for the 57th were surrendering their arms.

It is certain, as in all such cases, that everything will have been dreadfully exaggerated; and as one example of this, from Delhi the assurance was that the massacre of the British had been universal and indiscriminating; but *now*, though so little



time has elapsed, the horrid butchery is reduced to 'eleven' officers killed.

So I hope for more cheerful accounts. But what insanity it is that has governed our Indian administrators, if, knowing causes of fierce irritation amongst the Sepoys, they have persisted in lazily neglecting them, and suffering such perilous discounts to ferment in extensive camps? <sup>81</sup>

The long uncertainties which followed can only be guessed at, for there are few letters. Delhi fell on September 20; but it must have been weeks before the good news arrived. And even then the anxieties must have continued. And in November he speaks of the sufferings of his nervous system, the result of long anxiety, bringing on, as we have seen, terrible dreams.

### VIII

THERE is little dated information after the return from Ireland in August 1857. In March of the following year, we have a letter to Professor Lushington which indicates that De Quincey was aware of a serious ailment.

Saturday, March 20, 1858.

My dear Lushington,

I could not explain to Miss Stark the nature of that affection which has for some time back disabled me, or at least crippled my movements. It is in fact a singular case; and, though (in spite of it) my general health is good, yet being accompanied by *purpura* in the right foot, naturally it makes change of position difficult and sometimes painful to me. In these circumstances my want of energy for any purpose of action (always a besetting infirmity of mine from youth upwards) has allowed my papers of all sorts, printed and MSS. to accumulate in an excess which now renders my room such a scene of wreck and confusion, that I am seriously ashamed to have it seen. Pray pardon the trouble which I have unavoidably allowed you to incur. I did not understand from Miss St. until this very minute 11.25 A.M. that you meditated a call so early as (possibly) before 12: so that I feel it doubtful whether I *could* now intercept your walk.

You will ask me — Why I do not consult a surgeon? The brief answer is — that wishing to be sure of a sound opinion in the first place, and (in the event of any operation being requisite) — secondly of a first rate operator, I think of going to London. Yet why not resort to Syms? Simply because I

<sup>81</sup> Page, II, 129; BS. MSS.

have heard things about him which cause me to recoil from any communication with him.

My note has fallen into the ashes; and you see the result on the left hand of that word *ashes*. All is dust and ashes.

Ever yours affectionately,  
Thomas De Quincey.

Our accounts from India are very good. Florence in 4 or 5 months with little May is to come home for a year.<sup>82</sup> . . .

As a matter of fact, Florence did not come home until more than a year later, on account of the expectation and birth of a second child, a daughter, and then she was just too late to see her father again. So was it that he never saw her two children.

## IX

So to the end in December 1859, De Quincey lived on at 42 Lothian Street, never going out and seeing few friends; compelled to retreat from all conversation or personal communication with visitors; at home in the midst of the chaos of books and manuscripts and clouds of dust whenever he sought for a missing document. On 29 January 1859 he wrote to Findlay to explain his not seeing him when he had called to deliver an invitation to dinner to meet Mr. Carruthers of Inverness. It characteristically begins with a summary written at the top of the sheet. 'You will find somewhere below, but buried in a heap of words, that, to my great regret, I shall not be able to join your party today.' In the note itself he explained that the excuse for his not being able to see Mr. Findlay the day before, namely, 'that he had gone abroad to walk,' was 'a romantic fiction "pure and simple" of Miss Jean Stark's. And certainly while her "hand was in," she might as well have asserted that I was botanising on the Himalayahs — which would have been conclusive, needing no more words — whereas now she had left to you the labour of reading, to me of explaining' — that he was finishing up his tenth volume!

He went on, 'The word *roth* makes me ashamed; but it is Boston that is answerable, Yankee Boston. I am, as it happens, unable at this time to walk; *that* might have been

remedied by a cab; but there is a more complex hindrance from the grievous defect (default, or how shall I express it?) of an amanuensis — my youngest daughter, who otherwise is my right hand, being unavoidably absent in Tipperary; and thus it is that I am embargoed triply in this anchorage of 42 L. Street.' <sup>23</sup>

## X

THE following letter, written to an unknown correspondent, is the account of one of his days during his last year.

Tuesday, May 24 [1859].

My dear Sir,

Here is a sketch of one day as I now drag through daily with very trivial variations: — 15 min. bef. 4 A.M. I find myself broad awake. From this time to 7.30 (making 3 hours +  $\frac{3}{4}$  ths) I am a miserable suffering cripple — not daring to stoop or stretch out my arm. I find all the time little enough for doing such wretched processes as I am compelled to call *dressing*; not much of a dandy am I, yet after all, from sheer abstinence in every department, I come forward to the *derrock* (Westmoreland) in good fighting spirits. 7.30 A.M. (I am speaking of to-day) comes breakfast, tea and two or three biscuits. 8 A.M. come the newspapers, which villainous compounds are full of malice and of endless misconstruction; these it is that fill the atmosphere of life with irritation. They also meet with irritation, but their answers are instant, effective, perfect. 8.30 A.M. comes a letter from Tipperary that would require three laborious days for a commensurate answer. 9 A.M. to nearly noon I write a supplementary page or more to a half sheet on Lessing — for the 13th volume is drawing near to its close. Noon or thereabouts my trifle of dinner is served up. In twelve minutes more a stranger, whom there are unanswerable reasons for seeing, summons me away. He detains me till ten minutes after three. I then find that Johnny is looked for every minute to fetch the proofs, in which no progress is made. Near 4 P.M., while thinking in perplexity on this subject, most naturally I fall asleep, having accomplished and rounded a day of thirteen hours. 7.15 P.M. I awaken, and find barely time to sign, ever,

T. De Q.<sup>24</sup>

Weakness had unmistakably been creeping upon him. As we should expect, he was long unwilling that a physician

<sup>23</sup> Findlay, p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> Japp, p. 357.

should be called in and that his daughter should be summoned. But on October 22, Dr. Warburton Begbie began regular visits.

'My first visit to Mr. De Quincey was on the afternoon of Saturday, the 22nd October 1859. I had never seen Mr. De Quincey before that day. . . I found him in the parlour, sitting on a sofa, but resting his head on a cushion placed on a chair before him; this posture was assumed not from pain, but by reason of feebleness. He received me with all that graciousness and winning kindness of manner and speech for which he was remarkable, and briefly explained the nature of his indisposition. . . . I found Mr. De Quincey then, as for many days thereafter, able and ready to speak on all subjects with that clearness of intellect and perception which were so remarkably his; indicating no failure, as far as I could judge, of the mental faculties.

'The following day, Sunday (October 23rd), Mr. De Quincey was better; the degree of feverishness which existed the previous day had passed; . . . On this occasion, as on many subsequent visits, Mr. De Quincey alluded to the habit, in which he had so long indulged, of taking opium. . . . I then learned, as I had been led to believe, that for a long period Mr. De Quincey's indulgence in opium was extremely limited; though the total abandonment of its use he had found to be (and with this conclusion, in a case of confirmed habit, medical men will not be disposed to differ) inconsistent with the enjoyment of that bodily health, but more particularly that state of mental calmness and tranquility, the possession of which he desiderated above all things.'

For two or three weeks he had recurrent fevers from which he quickly recovered; but each time he grew a little weaker.

'During those days of dull November . . . Mr. De Quincey was evidently becoming feebler. He was generally unwilling to think so himself, but at times referred with perfect composure to the probably not distant approach of the last enemy. Summoned on one occasion hurriedly by night to his bedside, owing to a tendency to swoon, which then for the first time during his illness had alarmed his daughter and attendant, I arrived to find him better, and to receive from his lips those warm and courteous expressions of gratitude which throughout life I shall hold in remembrance, coupled with an apology for disturbing me at so late an hour, adding that his desire to see me had arisen from the conviction that, were the symptoms he suffered to con-

tinue or to return, death must occur. This was said calmly and most resignedly.'

Occasionally his mind wandered. Once or twice, suddenly awakening from sleep, he seemed much startled and surprised; and for a short time he had difficulty in identifying persons and objects in the room. At other times he spoke words in his delirium showing 'perfect composure within.'<sup>85</sup>

## XI

EMILY, who had been during the summer and autumn with her sister in Ireland, soon after October 22 took up her residence at 42 Lothian Street and tended her father to the end. It is from her that we learn the most interesting details of the last weeks.

De Quincey was 'wonderfully sweet and gentle'; but he hated anything like rules, and it was hard to make him follow any medical directions. 'Life that was to be floated on stated doses of beef-tea, did not seem to his care-worn mind worth the struggling for; and as to any medicine which owed its effect to repeated doses at fixed times, it was set aside as a "devil's drench" which was not fit for a Christian to swallow.'

Mr. Findlay, Professor Lushington, Mr. Hill Burton were the only friends of De Quincey's to see him during his illness; but friends of Emily and her sisters — Mrs. Graham Murray, Miss Helen Smith, and Miss Agnes Widnell — the last two neighbours at Lasswade — were constantly sending in food or calling to cheer the nurse.

'About a week before he died,' Emily wrote long afterwards, 'while sitting up in an easy chair lent him by his kind friend Mr. Findlay, he gave me a long account of Froude's views upon the History of Henry VIII.'<sup>86</sup> One night, when Miss Stark had left him, and I had taken her place, he woke up from his short sleep, and noticed Miss Stark's absence, and then went on to say, "By the way, I wished to tell you what has displeased me much." I saw he was anxious about something, and I went and sat down beside him to listen. He then treated me to one of those curious turns that his passing attacks of delirium would take. "I am grieved," he said, "at the coarse manners that

<sup>85</sup> Page, II, 295 ff.

<sup>86</sup> He had written an article on this subject for *Titan* in 1856.

some rough fellows displayed." I said, "Why? What have they done?" "Well, you know, I and the children were invited to the great supper. Do you know what supper I mean?" "No," I said. "Well, I was invited to come, and to bring the children to the great supper of Jesus Christ. So, wishing the children to have suitable dresses for such an occasion, I had them all dressed in white. They were dressed from head to foot in white. But some rough men in the streets of Edinburgh, as we passed on our way to the supper, seeing the little things in complete white, laughed and jeered at us, and made the children much ashamed."

'We had rarely heard him mention his father's name during his life, he having died early. But one day he said, "There is a thing I much regret, that is, that I did not know more of my dear father, for I am sure that a juster, kinder man never breathed." He then went on to tell me many traits of his father's character which he had learned from clerks and servants, and which he had treasured up for years in his memory.'

<sup>87</sup>

A few days before the end, Dr. Begbie advised sending for Margaret in Tipperary; but forbade any mention of the fact to the patient. Yet De Quincey seemed to have a prophetic feeling that she was on the way to him, saying, 'Has M. got to that town yet, that we stopped at when we went to Ireland? How many hours will it be before she can be here? Let me see — there are eight hours before I can see her, and three added to that!' And coming earlier than was expected, she arrived almost exactly at the time her father had predicted.

'On the morning his daughter arrived occurred the first intimation his family had seen that the hand of death was upon him. He had passed a quiet but rather sleepless night, appearing "much the same, yet more than ordinarily loving." After greeting his child, he said, "And how does mamma's little girl like her leaving her?" "Oh, they [the grandchildren] were very glad to have me come to grandpapa, and they sent this kiss, — which they did of their own accord." He seemed much pleased. It was evident that Margaret presented herself to him as the mother of children, the constant theme of his wanderings. Once when his daughter left the room, he said, "They are all leaving me but my *dear* little children." I heard him call one day distinctly, "Florence! Florence! Florence!" — again, "My dear, dear mother!" — and to the last he called us "my love," and it sounded like no other word ever uttered. I never heard such

pathos as there was in it, and in every tone of his voice. It gave me an idea of a love that passeth all understanding.'

And again, 'Of my brothers he often spoke, both those that are dead and those that are live, as if they were his own brothers. One night he said, when I entered the room, "Is that you, Horace?" "No, papa." "Oh, I see! I thought you were Horace; for he was talking to me just now, and I suppose has just left the room."' <sup>38</sup>

Towards the evening of Margaret's arrival, 'his weakness became extreme, and he said to [Margaret], "Mamma, I cannot bear the weight of clothes upon my feet." My sister at once pulled off the heavy blankets, and wrapped a light shawl round his feet. "Is that better?" she asked. "Yes, my love, much better; I am better in every way — I feel much better. You know that these are the feet that Jesus washed."' <sup>39</sup>

During the next night he was thought to be dying, 'but he lingered on and on till half-past nine the next morning. He told me something about "to-morrow morning," and something about sunshine; but the thought that he was talking about what he would never see drove the exact idea out of my head, though I am sure it was morning in another world he was talking of.' <sup>40</sup>

Just before he died he looked round the room, and said very tenderly to the nurse, the physician, and his daughters who were present, 'Thank you, — thank you all!' Courtesy and affection were in his last conscious speech.

He sank into heavy slumber. 'Twice only was the heavy breathing interrupted by words. He had for hours ceased to recognise any of us, but we heard him murmur, though quite distinctly, "My dear, dear mother. Then I was greatly mistaken." Then as the waves of death rolled faster and faster over him, suddenly out of the abyss we saw him throw up his arms, which to the last retained their strength, and say distinctly, and as if in great surprise, "Sister! sister! sister!" The loud breathing became slower and slower, and as the world of Edinburgh awoke to busy work and life, all that was mortal of my father fell asleep for ever.' <sup>41</sup>

There was an extraordinary appearance of youth about him, both for some time before and after death. He looked

<sup>38</sup> H. M. Alden in *The Atlantic Monthly*, XII, 366.

<sup>39</sup> Page, II, 304.

<sup>40</sup> Alden, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Page, II, 305.

more like a boy of fourteen, and very beautiful.<sup>42</sup> We did not like to let in the morning light, and the candle was burning at nine o'clock, when the post brought the following letter, which my sister and myself glanced over by the candle light, just as we were listening to his decreasing breath. At the moment it did not strike me with astonishment, as such an extraordinary coincidence, that when we came to read it afterwards it did.'<sup>43</sup>

The letter was a note from Edward Grinfield his old school-fellow at Winkfield sixty years before, asking for word from him. And Emily added, 'I do not remember the name of G., but the name of Edward constantly recurred in his wanderings.'

Thomas De Quincey died on the morning of 8 December 1859.

## XII

IN 1822 De Quincey had written, 'Like other men, I have particular fancies about the place of my burial; having lived chiefly in a mountainous region, I rather cleave to the conceit that a grave in a green church-yard amongst the ancient and solitary hills will be a sublimer and more tranquil place of repose for a philosopher than any in the hideous Golgothas of London.'<sup>44</sup> But that fancy had been uttered thirty-seven years before; and since then he had been for thirty years a denizen of Edinburgh. Fittingly, therefore, he found his final resting-place in St. Cuthbert's church-yard, under the shadow of the great Castle, within sound of the traffic of Princes Street, beside the remains of his wife, and, we may hope, of his two boys, Julius and William. Over the grave is a simple head-stone with an inscription, recording but one error — the place of his birth. It runs as follows:

<sup>42</sup> Miss Emily De Quincey to Professor A. Scott of Westminster College, Cambridge, 1910. She refers to De Quincey as: — 'A delightful but naughty wayward child that wanted a whipping at times, but always sweet and tender, so frail, so weak, so very light at last that when I was nursing him in his last illness, I used to lift him in my arms like a child and carry him to the arm-chair and he told the doctor I was a "female Hercules." He did not know how light he was.'

<sup>43</sup> Alden, *op. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> *Works*, III, 472.



SACRED  
TO THE MEMORY OF  
THOMAS DE QUINCEY  
WHO WAS BORN IN GREENHAY  
NEAR MANCHESTER,  
AUGUST 15TH 1785,  
AND DIED IN EDINBURGH  
DECEMBER 8TH 1859:  
AND OF MARGARET, HIS WIFE,  
WHO DIED  
AUGUST 7TH 1837.

## XIII

AFTER the death of his mother and the assumption of family affairs by his daughters, the debts which for so many years had hounded De Quincey, had brought him so often to the horn, had led to his arrest and driven him into hiding and into sanctuary, were for the most part gradually paid. In 1854 his dues to Mrs. Wilson were being settled regularly, in startling contrast to the situation in regard to the Miss Millers and Mr. McIndoes of former days.

Yet at least one of the older debts still dragged on. In 1855 Miss Miller of Holyrood was demanding 'one hundred guineas and upwards'; and she still held in her possession his papers and books. He somewhat vaguely felt that he could not owe her any such sum; but *if* he did he would assuredly pay her. And he appealed to his daughter Margaret to throw light upon the matter, an interesting sign that he had placed his affairs pretty largely in the hands of his capable children.<sup>45</sup> But the claim was not settled at the time. Four years later, only a few months before his death, Miss Miller fell ill; and he was driven into a minor panic lest the books and papers still in her clutches should, at her death, fall into rapacious hands.<sup>46</sup> But Miss Miller apparently did not die, and never during his lifetime did he recover the precious pledges. For in the inventory of De Quincey's estate, effects which belonged to the deceased at his lodgings in Holyrood were duly listed. Thus to the end, one account at least hung on unpaid, even

<sup>45</sup> Page, II, 269.

<sup>46</sup> BS. MSS.

though De Quincey believed, and we have Mrs. Bairdsmith's word for it, that he had paid off all his *just* debts.<sup>47</sup> After his death, *all* his debts were settled, and the estate, such as it was, was honourably cleared by his executrix, his eldest daughter Margaret Craig.<sup>48</sup>

De Quincey left no will; but among the records of Inventories of the City of Edinburgh, is still preserved the inventory of his estate. It is divided into two parts: the first, covering property in Scotland, and the second, property in England. In Scotland there were cash in his lodgings of £1.18.0: books and other effects at 42 Lothian Street and in Holyrood to the value of £26.5.0: a bill from James Hogg dated on 26 April 1859, payable in 18 months and not discounted, for £100: and 'a claim on the said James Hogg and Sons' valued at £90 — in all making a total reckoning of £218.3.0. In England there were 'Books in the possession of Mr. Harrison, Penrith' valued at £16.11.3; a certain proportion of dividends on consols from his mother's estate; and of rent on land, also from his mother's estate — altogether making a total of £44.10.9. Thus the grand total was £262.13.9. In addition to this small sum, he left behind the property which had been left to him by his mother in trust, so that his children were not left entirely unprovided for.

<sup>47</sup> Such was De Quincey's reputation of carelessness in money matters; such was the class of people with whom he had financial dealings, that he was not infrequently the 'victim of rogues'; and there is more than one indication that he occasionally paid fraudulent bills.

<sup>48</sup> BS. MSS. Mrs. Bairdsmith to John Findlay, 1877. Mrs. Bairdsmith was protesting against certain statements and implications in the review of Dr. Japp's Life of De Quincey in *Blackwood's Magazine* for December, 1877.

## EPILOGUE

**S**UCH then was the life of Thomas De Quincey as it can be traced from the imperfect records fitfully preserved by the carelessness of fate and men; seventy-four years of one of the saddest careers in literary history. He was the victim of unfortunate circumstances; but even more, he was the victim of his own character. He was protagonist in a long tragedy; yet in a tragedy not without its comic relief and a peaceful ending. The drama has been presented at length; there but remains to ring down the curtain with a brief epilogue.

De Quincey was born with great gifts. He had a brilliant mind, a phenomenal memory, an extraordinary power of subtle analysis, independence of thought and unique eloquence. Even more, he had something of what we call genius; not creative, perhaps, but a shaping energy which compelled all that it touched into forms expressive of its own nature and vitality. Furthermore, he was born with sensitiveness to beauty and the grandeur of the human mind as it is expressed in poetry and history, to the mystery of the world and its intricacies. He was responsive to the gentler sides of life; to sympathy with the weak and suffering; to love, especially in regard to women and children. But more striking was his indomitable will, which is, as it were, the hard kernel of his character; so that throughout his bitter struggles against hardships, poverty, ill-health, mental misery and anguish, loss of wife and children he never completely despaired; but with little short of heroism, kept on to the end unbroken. He was no weakling, in spite of his diminutive size, his fragile body, his delicate organization. On the contrary, he was self-contained, self-assured, even, in a sense, arrogant underneath his outward gentleness. His nature made him essentially solitary in the fastness of his own personality, aloof from men and the world; and with unquestioning reliance upon his own measure of values. He was fundamentally resistant to the blows of fate and the consequences of his own weakness and mistakes.

**PLATE VIII. TWO SIGNATURES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY**

The first is affixed to a note addressed to James Hogg, Esq. dated 22 December 1857; the second is affixed to a receipt for £3.0.0. from James Hogg & Sons, dated 22 July 1857. Both MSS. are in possession of the author.

The first has an unmistakable small *d*; the second an equally unmistakable capital *D*.



With intellectual brilliancy and strength went impracticality in the business of living. In spite of his intellectual power and pride, he was strangely timid and shy; the result of his slowness of response to external situations and his consciousness of his unreadiness. On intellectual planes his mind moved with logical sureness to conclusions; on practical planes he was slow to make decisions and slower yet to put them into action. Physically and mentally he moved with deliberation; and when an ordinary or extraordinary crisis sprang up in daily life, he could not meet it with promptness. Decisions were painful to him, to the extent that procrastination became a habit. He could never move unless he was forced; but *when* he would be forced into action, no one could tell, least of all himself. It was as if the will, stronger in him than in most men, could not focus upon the concrete. His consciousness of this defect was one cause of his shyness; but there was another, his extreme sensitiveness in alliance with his mental pride. He of all men disliked contest. His nature was essentially gentle, hating to give or to see pain. His own convictions were strong and firmly founded in feeling and thought; but he preferred reticence to differences of opinion. His fear lest he should find differences led him to expect them. So did he shun strangers rather than risk rebuffs or controversy. Add to this, a morbid fear lest he should impose upon others, and we find him surrounded by inhibitions. It was only as a writer and in conversation with sympathetic listeners that he broke through; but even then, the sanctity of the inner man was rigidly concealed, any apparent frankness being more or less illusory. Spiritual solitude was one of his most notable characteristics.

A corollary to this is that he lacked spontaneity. He had strong feelings. John Wilson wrote playfully of his dreadful passions. But his intellect and his will usually kept them under control. They broke out after the death of Kate Wordsworth, they mastered him in the romance with Margaret Simpson, they appeared in his admiration for Wordsworth and Coleridge. They offer glimpses of themselves in the dim grudges against Coleridge and Wilson. They were steady in his abiding love for his family. But there were bar-

riers which prevented his more genial and affectionate inner nature from pouring itself out in easy and cordial friendship. He could never let himself go. Friendship seemed impossible for him. In the full sense of the word, he had no friends. Acquaintances he had who might be referred to as friends; but throughout his life there was but one friendship which could be described as intimate, that with Wilson; and it did not endure. Indeed, it seems probable that De Quincey was merely for a time swept off his feet by Wilson's exuberance and buoyancy, and that De Quincey on his side never really overcame the reserve which was instinctive. He came nearest to spontaneous affection in his relations with women and children, as in that happy period, all too brief, when he was close to Mary and Dorothy Wordsworth and to Wordsworth's children; and in the relations with his own family. But women and children he looked upon as lower in the scale of being; as closer to nature, perhaps, so that he could accept them uncritically without endangering his inner secrecy. With them he did not need to be on the defensive.

De Quincey was famous for his manners. They were perfect; they were exquisite. Inherited from the good breeding of his eighteenth century home, they expressed the refinement of his nature, the delicacy of his feelings. But they also served as a protection for that supersensitive self. They were a cloak to keep him close from prying eyes and aggressions. In his social relationships, his manners gave the satisfaction of style which was so strong in him and which also gave to his writing and to his talk rare distinction. His manners were deliberate, elaborate, polished, and gentle. They covered up his incapacity for spontaneity; but they also gave to his behaviour a beauty of form which satisfied his esthetic nature. He was an artist in more ways than one. He was not insincere; he was as sincere as he could be within the limits of art; but he was usually controlled in all his actions. The result was very charming. Many testify that he was courteous, gentle, considerate and interesting, and they were all captivated. But they never *knew* him. He was elusive, strange, and a mystery.

Where another man might have hidden himself behind a façade of good manners and have remained secret but incon-

spicuous, De Quincey became eccentric. He was too little in contact with the changing social world, too little aware of it, too little flexible, perhaps, to assimilate himself with it. He was *naïf*. Early habits of a more formal age clung to him, and he did not change with the seasons. One finds it as well in his thought as in his writing. There is little indication of development throughout his life. It accounts for the impression which he gives of having lived well on into an age which was not his, so that he died almost an anachronism in 1859, a relic from a period long past, without his being conscious of the fact. This alone would have tended to make him a quaint figure in his old age. But when those who came to know him found those exquisite and formal manners wrapped up in the poorest and most outlandish clothes; when in his utter indifference to dress — except in the matter of neatness — he would behave like a prince with no shoes, or lacking a stocking or a coat, the effect was startling. But in no situation was he aware of the impression he was making.

The same cloak of style was seen in his conversation as in his manners. Style was native to him from the start, the expression of the born artist who must by an uncontrollable instinct frame all his ideas into a satisfying form, give to the raw material of thought and knowledge order stamped by personality. This verbal gift acted, not less, as protection for his sensitive and shrinking self. The curious little man made those who met him smile; but when he talked they could only marvel. The casual conversation of society became in his mouth a thing of beauty. Sentences developed through all the intricacies of evolution into perfect periods, so that his talk ran with the qualities of his written prose. De Quincey has set down his ideas upon the art of conversation, and in so doing he was merely describing his own practice. He was eccentric by the very superiority which he showed. His sensitiveness and consideration for others led him to give his interlocutors a chance. Unlike Coleridge and Macaulay, *he* could listen. Yet when he was in the proper mood to go on, he forgot time and might talk all night.

Those who have left records of his conversation, from Woodhouse to Findlay, have marvelled at its quality and



range. It was rarely confidential or personal in the full sense. It was easy, flowing, deliberate, the outpouring of a full mind. With almost preternatural keenness, he analysed, distinguished, judged and related, not as if he were thinking aloud, but rather as if he *had* thought. His ideas were all waiting, having been won in long meditations with their associations already attached, and ready to be presented. If ever a man drew from a storehouse of acquisition and thought, it was he. Unlike Coleridge who improvised with miraculous bravura, De Quincey spoke conclusions. He was not didactic; but he was judicial. He might be prejudiced; but his ideas were the result of deliberate conviction, with his prejudices logically embedded in the foundations of his thinking as principles. The result was, that even his most unstudied talk approximated essays, finished and coherent in development and form, its very finish hiding once more the real man underneath; blinding, as it were, by excess of light.

Naturally enough, however, his eccentricity was more deeply rooted than in the externalities of manners and style. The man had a very definite and strange personality. No one of his generation had had such experiences, inner and outer, and they could not but leave their marks upon his mind and his whole being.

He was naturally given to what is nowadays called introversion, an almost morbid tendency to look inwards and backwards, to brood over the pageant of his dreams, his agonies and his miseries. In the weaker moments of physical collapse or inhibited will this tendency was increased and he seems to have spent long periods of time in which the external world became unreal. He sank into helpless wretchedness or fear: so that his actual experiences became magnified and abnormally powerful in his imagination. It was these states of mind which stamped him with strangeness — a strangeness which he always carried about with him.

His works contain more confessions and reminiscences than those of almost any other man of letters. He has analysed his motives, his impulses, his sufferings. He was profoundly interested in himself, and he has told us so. But even in this autobiographic mood — in his literary expression of it — he

escapes us. Instead of looking from the inside out, he looks from the outside in. He had had unique experiences; they were, he felt, of general interest. But his purpose in writing of them was not to reveal himself, but merely to relate them objectively. Once more he is the artist, the stylist; and all his evident truth is raised, selected, interpreted, and glorified. He is honest as artist rather than as man.

While manners and style served both to satisfy De Quincey's artistic sense and to give him a protection for his inner self, the modern psychologist would also point out that they served no less as compensation for his diminutive size and his unimpressive person. He was keenly aware of his physical shortcomings, at least in his earlier years; and in that interesting outline for an essay written at Coniston in his college days, he tells of the need of manners to give an alternate claim to respect when natural limitations were apparent. How deliberate and lasting was his endeavour to build up this compensation, it is impossible to say. But he certainly attained it, consciously or unconsciously.

All witnesses testify that De Quincey gave the impression of being simple and childlike. But he was certainly not without guile. He knew what tact was; he was capable of manoeuvring for position, as when he sought the editorship of *The Westmorland Gazette*, when he tried to dupe the redoubtable McIndoe, when he conducted the negotiations in connexion with *The Nab*. He had subtlety of mind, evident in all his writing; and he was not averse from legal technicalities. Abstractly speaking, he would have made a good lawyer. He was not beyond stating his own situation to his mother or uncle so that the effect came close to misrepresentation. Yet on the whole this more questionable side of him was kept in abeyance. He looked upon his relatives as sent of Heaven to succour him in difficulties — an attitude not unique in De Quincey. His experiences with creditors led him to look upon them as nuisances to be mulcted, rather than as human beings with serious problems of their own which in other circumstances he might have contemplated with pity. There is no doubt that he was often put upon by unscrupulous men and women who took advantage of his unbusiness-

like methods, or worked upon his sentimentality. The truth seems to be that whenever he had to do with money, or rather when he was placed, or had placed himself, in a position in which he owed money, he was seized with panic; and he behaved like a frightened rabbit driven to any shifts to find safety. He forgot that he was living on his creditors; he only felt that he was being oppressed for something which embarrassed him, so that his normal kindness was frightened out of him. On the other hand, he was constantly expressing his desire to pay his debts, and in the end he did so. There is a long record of scrupulous conscientiousness in meeting his literary obligations, in his often repeated declarations that he wanted not help but merely an opportunity to earn, in his manly acceptance of refusals by editors. It is still possible to see him as genuinely honest, if slightly aberrant in certain material crises when he was forced to fight for his life.

In summing up De Quincey's character, it is impossible to omit the influence of opium. For the most part it was evil; it hampered rather than helped him to become a distinguished man of letters. He was preternaturally given to dreaming before he tasted the drug which only strengthened his natural inclination. He was fragile in health and given to mental anguish and misery before opium took hold of him. He would have been strange had he never fallen under its spell. It did magnify and intensify his dreams; but while it assuaged some of his sufferings, it caused others infinitely worse. It tended to accentuate his solitariness, it increased his procrastination and weakened what little power he had of focusing his will upon practical decisions. Even more, the habit threatened constantly to strangle him both as writer and as man. It often gained the upper hand. The battles against it were fearful, and he never won clear victories, although now and then, and finally in the long last, he attained a compromise peace and a fairly satisfactory *modus vivendi*. But in the continuing campaigns, apart from the sheer physical conflict, the major tragedy lay in the fact that his better nature was too often twisted out of shape. In the darker moments of temporary defeat, those worst elements of his character escaped from the subliminal dungeons in which they

were normally locked by his gentleness and kindliness — his suspicions, his almost superstitious fears, his disingenuousness, his grudges. Thus in 1821 towards the end of that longest and darkest period of submersion in opium, he felt that distrust of Wilson from which he never quite recovered. He may have felt some offence, fancied or real; but the hostility he expressed in his conversations with Woodhouse could not in happier moments have become an obsession. It seems only fair to assume that other periods of almost utter collapse may explain certain of those traits which now and then crop out to disconcert us.

But we must not push this theory too far. One must admit that De Quincey had a tenacious memory for what he considered slights, and that periods of depression intensified it. Yet, curiously enough, this memory of slights centred upon three men only, Wilson, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Under all the admiration which he had for Coleridge, there lingers some touch of animosity; under all the worship which he felt for Wordsworth's poetry lies a latent bitterness against the man. Could he not forget Coleridge's inability to pay back those £300; could he not forget Wordsworth's attitude towards him just before and after De Quincey's marriage? But apart from these three, others drew forth keen criticism, not to be confused, however, with the acid comments upon the greater figures. This other criticism was born of disinterested judgment and intellectual analysis, and was delivered for the most part in conversation in which he was caustic in his deliberate way. But it was not vicious. Nor, I believe, can he ever be called vicious; even his strictures upon Coleridge and Wordsworth were persistently accompanied by enthusiastic praise which cannot be bettered. One can only conclude that De Quincey tried to be judicial, and that, in all but a few instances, he was not unkindly, even though he never shunned incisive dicta not infrequently touched with humour. He would have been pained and surprised if anyone had charged him with prejudice or unfairness.

It has not been the aim of the present biography to estimate at length or finally his literary work, to judge De Quincey's ultimate literary importance. That is still hanging in the

balance. One can only say that so long as elaborate and grand prose is loved for its own sake, so long as the fascination of strange themes and subtle thought holds strength, there will always be those who will admire and read De Quincey. His mould of thought, his points of view, his very interests expressed with such splendour seem often in this age remote. But he was a master of style, of splendid rhythms; he had the grand manner in prose; he was now and then a great artist, so that in the history of English literature he must always have an assured place. Furthermore, besides being a *literary* figure of importance, he will continue to remain a fascinating if elusive personality.

## APPENDIX I

I LIST such items as I have been able to extract from court records in spite of my ignorance of Scottish law. They are drawn from the records of Protests and of Hornings and Poidings in the Register House, Edinburgh; from the records of Small Debt Cases and of Decreets in the Sheriff Clerk's Office, Edinburgh; and from the Process Book of the Bailie's Court, Holyrood. They are here arranged chronologically.

Since every Horning implies a previous Protest, I have usually given only the Protests not carried to conclusions.

The records of Decreets, of Small Debt Cases and the Process Book in most cases fail to give the sums involved. The Process Book is badly preserved and is incomplete during our period; the records are mere jottings showing the progress of suits often extending for months.

1831.	May 11.	Protest,	Suit of John Carfrae & Son, book-sellers. £37.16.6.
1832.	August 2, September 20,	Small Debt Case, Horning,	Suit of Muirhead. Suit of John Cathcart Porteous, £10.
1833.	May 23,	Horning,	Suit of Mrs. Margaret Learmouth for rent of 1 Forres St. £67.15.6. (This suit was brought against both DeQ. and Mrs. DeQ.)
	July 2, November 8, November 13,	Decreet, Small Debt Case, Horning,	Suit of John Carfrae, bookseller. Suit of John Davidson. Suit of Henry Gibson Duguid, Teacher of Music. £17.
1834.	April 10,	Horning,	Suit of John Carfrae, bookseller. £10.
	April 28,	(Process Book)	Suit of Mary Ann Grant, servant. £1.12.6.
	June 30,	(Process Book)	Suit of Mary Learmouth, grocer. £4.1.9.
	October 10,	(Process Book)	Suit of Henry Peacock, tailor. £10.17.0.
	December 17,	(Process Book)	Suit of David Nicolson. £12.1.8.
1837.	April 16,	(Process Book)	Suit of William Muir.
	June 20,	Protest,	Suit of Jane Miller. £17.
	August 7,	(Process Book)	Suit of David Nicolson. £12.1.8½.
	August 28,	Protest,	Suit of Robert Beauchop of Kennell House, near Bo'ness. £21.8.6.
	October 18,	Protest,	Suit of Alex. Colville et al. £20. (Note endorsed for William Miller.)
	October 18,	Protest,	Suit of Alex. Colville et al. £100. (Note endorsed for William Miller.)

	October 30,	Horning,	Suit of David Nicolson, merchant. £12.1.8½.
	November 3,	Protest,	Suit of Mr. Carr, Penrith. £35.
	November 7,	Horning,	Suit of Albion Cloth Company. £33.13.6.
	November 13,	(Process Book)	Suit of Margaret Craig.
1838.	April 12,	Horning,	Suit of John Craig, clothier. £30.
	May 10,	Horning,	Suit of Jane Miller. £30. (Appears concurrently in Process Book.)
	October 3,	Decreet,	Suit of James McIndoe. £15.9.6.
	October 29,	(Process Book)	Suit of James McIndoe. (Seeking the Bailly's concurrent action with Edinburgh court.)
1839.	January 7,	Protest,	Suit of John Boyd, merchant, Leith. £13.10.6.
	April 16,	Protest,	Suit of James McIndoe. £76.5.6.
	June 7,	Protest,	Suit of Commercial Bank of Scotland. £38.
1840.	January 22,	Horning,	Suit of Colville et al. £20. (Culmination of Protest of October 18, 1837. I failed to find that the Protest of the note for £100 ever came to Horning.)
	June 5,	(Process Book)	Suit of Jane Miller. (Petition to seize De Quincey's books and papers for sale.)
	July 10,	(Process Book)	Suit of David Nicolson.
	July 17,	(Process Book)	Suit of Jane Miller.
1841.	April 2,	Protest,	Suit of John Craig, clothier. £22.10.11½.
	April 18,	Protest,	Suit of James McIndoe. £18.

## APPENDIX II

Note for Thomas De  
Quincey Holyrood Gardens  
In the  
Bill of Suspension at  
his instance  
Against  
Robert Bauchope Esqr  
Kinneil House County  
of Linlithgow

26 June 1837

My Lord

Of this date, your Lordship was pleased, on advising this Bill, to pronounce the following Interlocutor 'To see and answer within fourteen days, meantime sists execution and to be intimated, and ordains the charger to produce the Bill charged on and the Complainer to produce quam primum of date anterior to the charge (signed) John Cunninghame' —

The Complainer having arranged with the charger as to the debt in question begs respectfully to withdraw the statement as to his signature to the Note charged on being a forgery and hereby consents to your Lordship refusing the Bill of Suspension —

In respect whereof  
(signed) Thomas DeQuincey.

(On outside: —)

Note  
for  
Thomas De Quincey  
in the  
Bill of Suspension  
at his instance  
A  
Robert Bauchope Esqr.  
12 July 1837.



Regd. Protest  
Bauchop

v  
DeQuincey  
1837

Compd. J. K.  
P. Smith S S C  
6/" pd

At Edinburgh the twenty eighth day of August Eighteen hundred and thirty seven. In presence of the Lords of Council and Session, compeared Mr. James Miller Jr. Advocate pröv. for Robert Bauchop Esqr, and gave in the Protest underwritten to be registered in their Lordships' Books conform to Law; which they ordained to be done whereof the tenor follows:

£21.8/6 Edinburgh 11th. July 1837. One month after date I promise to pay to Robert Bauchop Esq Kinneil House, near Bo'ness the sum of twenty pounds eight shillings and six pence value received (signed) Thomas DeQuincey. Payable at Miss Millers House Holyrood Gardens Edinburgh. At Edinburgh the twenty fifth day of August Eighteen hundred and thirty seven years. The principal Promissory note above copied was where payable duly protested by me Notary Public subscribing at the instance of Robert Bauchop therein designed to whom the same is payable against the said granter thereof Thomas DeQuincey Esquire residing at Holyrood Gardens Edinburgh for non payment of the contents thereof and for Interest damages and expenses as accords in presence of John Rogers and David Rodgers both writers in Edinburgh witnesses specially called to the premises Fideliter RoSmith N.P. — Extracted by

James Kilgour.

Horn and Poind  
Bauchop

v  
DeQuincey  
1837

A. Bennet.

Victoria by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen Defender of the Faith, To

Messengers  
at Arms our Sheriffs in that part conjunctly and severally specially constituted greeting; Whereas Thomas DeQuincey Esquire residing at Holyrood Gardens Edinburgh by his promissory note

dated the eleventh day of July Eighteen hundred and thirty seven promised one month after date to pay to our Lovite Robert Bauchop Esquire Kinneil House near Borrowstouness the sum of Twenty one pounds eight shillings and sixpence for value received which promissory note was duly protested at the instance of Our said Lovite for non payment of the contents &c. and the Instrument of protest taken thereupon was registered in the Books of Our Council and Session and a Decree of the Lords thereof of the date hereof interponed thereto as the same ordaining these our Letters in manner underwritten, and other necessary execution to pass thereon more fully bears; Our Will is herefore and We charge you that on sight hereof ye pass and in Our name and Authority command and charge the said Thomas De Quincey personally or at his dwelling place to make payment to Our said Lovite of the said principal sum of Twenty one pounds Eight shillings and sixpence Sterling and the legal interest thereof since the said promissory note registered protest and decree in all points within six days next after he is charged by you to that effect, under the pain of rebellion and putting him to the horn wherein if he fail the said space being elapsed that immediately thereafter ye denounce him our rebel put him to the horn and use the whole other order against him prescribed by law. Attour that ye lawfully fence arrest apprize compel poind and distrain all and sundry the said Thomas De Quincey's readiest moveable goods gear debts and sums of money, and other moveable effects of whatever denomination make penny thereof to the avail and quantity of the foresaid sums and see Our said Lovite completely paid and satisfied of the same. According to Justice as Ye shall answer to Us thereupon. Which to do We commit to you and each of you full power by these Our Letters delivering them by you duly executed and indorsed again to the Bearer. Given under Our Signet at Edinburgh the Twenty Eighth day of August in the first year of Our Reign 1837.

Per Decret: Dorum: Concilii  
Alex Bennet written by David  
Rodgers my Clk —

28 August 1837

(On reverse)

Upon the Twenty Eighth day of August Eighteen hundred and thirty Seven years by virtue of the within written letters of Horning dated and signeted this day, raised at the instance of the within designed Robert Bauchop Esquire, Kinnell House near Borrowstouness, Complainer; I Alexander Lyall, Messenger at Arms passed and in Her Majesty's name and authority, lawfully commanded and charged the also within designed Thomas De Quincey Esquire residing at Holyrood Gardens, Edinburgh, To

make payment to the said Complainer of the within mentioned principal sum or Twenty One pounds, eight shillings and Six pence Sterling, and the legal interest thereof, since due, and All paid, Contained in and due by the promissory note within narrated; And that within the space, under the pains, and with certification, Conform to said letters in all points; A just Copy of charge in virtue whereof, and to the effect foresaid, I left for the said Thomas De Quincey, in the hands of a servant within his dwelling place, Holyrood Gardens, Edinburgh, to be given to him, as I could not find himself personally; which Copy of charge, was signed by me, did bear the date hereof, and contained the date, and signeting of said Letters, with the names, and designations, of George Steel, and Patrick Casey, both Residenters in Edinburgh, witnesses present at the premises, and hereto with me Subscribers.

Alexander Lyall

George Steel Witness

Patrick Casey Witness <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Originals in possession of the Misses Masson.

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\* Items marked by an asterisk are printed (or reprinted) in James Hogg's *De Quincey and his Friends*





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